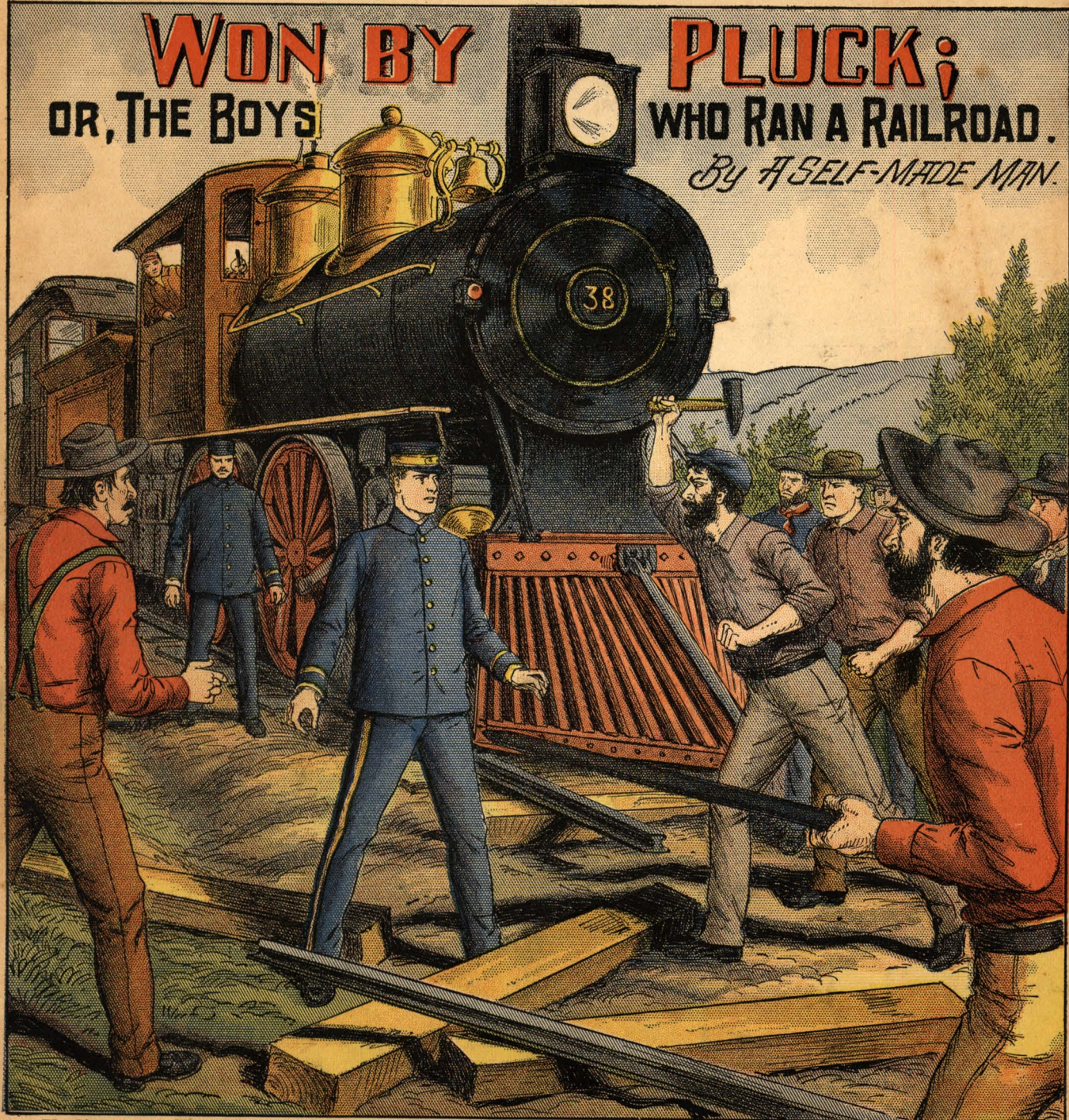


FAME AND FORTUNE WEEKLY.

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY.

WON BY **PLUCK;**
OR, THE BOYS **WHO RAN A RAILROAD.**
By A SELF-MADE MAN.



Undismayed, Hastings advanced and faced the threatening mob. A chorus of hoots and angry ejaculations was hurled at him, while one of the men raised the heavy hammer he carried and started forward as if he meant to strike the boy.

Fame and Fortune Weekly

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY

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Won by Luck;

OR,

The Boys Who Ran a Railroad.

By A SELF-MADE MAN.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCES HARRY HASTINGS AND FLORENCE ASHLEY.

"Why, Harry Hastings, this is indeed a surprise!" exclaimed Florence Ashley, a pretty, golden-haired girl of fifteen, daughter of one of the leading merchants of Rushville, who had just boarded at Brookport the through north-bound afternoon accommodation train on the Lakeshore Railroad, and taking a vacant seat near the door of the car, found herself face to face with a handsome, well-dressed boy of eighteen, who also lived in Rushville.

"I'm delighted to meet you, Miss Ashley," said Harry, with a pleased smile, raising his hat and taking the little gloved hand which she extended to him.

He and Florence were the very best of friends.

In fact he thought there wasn't another girl in the world who could compare with Miss Ashley.

What she thought about Harry Hastings was one of the secrets she wasn't giving away.

"Why, how far down the road have you been, Mr. Hastings?" she asked, as the train began to pull out of the station.

"I've been to Delhi Junction."

"Indeed! So far as that?" she said, in some surprise.

"Why, that's not so very far. Only seventy miles from here."

"I suppose it seems longer to me than it does to you, as I have never been there. What kind of a place is it?"

"It's quite a bustling, good-sized town. That's where this road connects with the D. W. & P. for points east, west and south."

"Yes, I know," she replied. "By the way, why is the train so late to-day? I've been waiting more than a half hour at the station. I heard a man say that this is becoming a common occurrence, while another remarked that he guessed the Lakeshore Road is going to the dogs, as he called it."

"Really I couldn't say why the train is late. It left Delhi Junction on time, but it stopped ten minutes at Tyrone Village, on the other side of the bridge, and then after passing the down accommodation at the siding four miles this side of Tyrone Bridge, it stopped again for several minutes. I believe a gang of section men were doing something to the track. The road has certainly been running on a sort of go-as-you-please principle for many weeks," he added, with a look of annoyance on his well-bred features; "but," significantly, "there is likely to be a change for the better before long."

"I hope so," she said, earnestly. "Papa is simply disgusted with the way things are running. He says the entire policy of the road has been changed since your father died and Parsons Thorndyke was elected to fill his place as president."

"There seems to be no question about that fact, I am sorry to say," replied the boy.

"Papa says that if things don't improve, the company may some day default on the semi-annual interest of its First Mortgage bonds, in which case it will go into the hands of a receiver."

"I hope the road will never come to that," replied Harry, soberly. "At least it won't if I can manage to prevent it. My whole fortune is invested in the 25,000 shares of stock left to me by my father, the voting power of which is controlled by my mother as my guardian. Then my particular friends, Walter Whipple and Harry Hawks, have each 10,000 shares. So you see, between the three of us we hold within 5,000 shares of a controlling interest in the road."

"Then you ought to insist on having some change made in the way the road is being run at present."

"That's just what we're going to do. When father died this road had the Brookport Navigation Company, which used to control the freight and passenger traffic on the lake between Rushville and Brookport, beaten to a standstill. Ever since Mr. Thorndyke assumed the management of the company the steamboat people have been recovering by degrees their lost ground. The Lakeshore trains have become so irregular in their running that lots of people traveling between Rushville and Brookport are patronizing the boats as of old, before the railroad was built; and in addition to that, some of the heaviest local shippers have transferred their freight patronage to the Navigation Company. Thus we have lost a lot of revenue which, together with the expense of building the branch line from Brookport to Loon River, compelled the Board of Directors to pass the semi-annual dividend on the first of the year. There is very little chance of any dividend being declared on the first of this coming July, either. This is a very serious matter, not only for me, but for Walt Whipple and Larry Hawks. We are, of course, the heaviest losers, that's why there's going to be something doing at the annual meeting next week."

The Lakeshore Railroad, to which this conversation referred, was a double-track line ninety-five miles in length, running almost due south from Rushville, a thrifty little city of thirty thousand inhabitants, on the D. P. & Q. trunk line, to Delhi Junction, on the D. W. & P.

Rushville was situated at the head of Lake Cahoosa, and the railroad followed the shore line to Brookport, an important town at the other end of the lake, twenty-five miles away.

A steamboat line, known as the Brookport Navigation Company, also plied between Rushville and Brookport and intermediate towns on the lake.

When the railroad went into operation the steamboat line took a back seat.

George Hastings, Harry's father, was the promoter of the Lakeshore Railroad, the principal stockholder, and the president.

When he died, one year previous, Parsons Thorndyke was elected by the Board of Directors to fill his place.

The road then was on the highway of prosperity, and paying semi-annual dividends of three per cent.

Now, just twelve months later, it was in a bad way.

For this remarkable change in the road's prospects the Rushville and Brookport newspapers roasted Parsons Thorndyke, while many of the stockholders put up a big kick.

But in spite of adverse criticism things went on just the same.

As the time for the annual meeting drew near, Harry Hastings, Walter Whipple and Lawrence Hawks, the largest stockholders, all about the same age, got together and decided that there would have to be a change in the management.

In fact, they resolved to run the road themselves.

They were careful, however, not to let their plans get out.

They meant to give Parsons Thorndyke the surprise of his life, for that gentleman fully expected to be re-elected on the board and also to the presidency.

Being an old friend of Mrs. Hastings, he relied on her support to overcome all opposition.

He never considered her son Harry as a factor in the situation, and that was where he made a fatal mistake.

While Harry Hastings and Florence Ashley were conversing the train was approaching the town of Paradise.

It was running at a good clip, too, as if the engineer was trying to make up for lost time.

Suddenly something happened.

Without the least warning the car in which Harry and Florence were seated was lifted bodily from the track and hurled down the embankment toward the lake, while the car behind piled on top of it, reducing it to almost a shapeless wreck.

CHAPTER II.

THE WRECK ON THE LAKESHORE RAILROAD.

When Harry Hastings recovered his scattered senses he found himself pinned down under a mass of broken and twisted debris.

The car had been literally wrenched to pieces, and the passengers were buried beneath the fragments.

Harry was stunned by the shock, and made giddy by the wild vaulting of the car as it leaped down the embankment to destruction.

He was bruised and lacerated, but he was not seriously injured.

He did not make the mistake which many persons do under such trying circumstances, of believing that they are killed; or, if their senses belie that impression, that they shall die within a short time.

Harry Hastings was endowed with a remarkable degree of self-possession, and never gave up anything as long as there was any chance of holding on.

His thoughts, and even his vitality, seemed to be suspended for an instant; then nature reasserted itself, and he made a strenuous effort to free himself from his perilous situation.

At first this seemed to be an utter impossibility, but Harry finally succeeded in struggling from beneath the wreck which had overwhelmed him.

His first consideration, after he had assured himself that he was comparatively uninjured, was for his companion, Florence Ashley.

All around him men and women were disengaging themselves, and being assisted, from the shapeless rubbish.

He did not see Florence among those who were struggling to escape.

"My heaven!" he groaned. "Is it possible she's buried under this mass of wreckage—dead may be?"

This terrible suggestion fairly staggered him, for he thought the world of the lovely girl, and he couldn't bear the idea that she might have been killed.

Standing on the very edge of the lake, he gazed wildly upon the chaos of splintered wood and twisted iron before him.

"She was either pinned in her seat or thrown into a heap near where I found myself at first," he breathed, anxiously.

A portion of the top of the car lay near him, which he raised by a great effort.

There, underneath, the heavy fragment crowding out her young life, lay Florence Ashley, her eyes closed and her marble cheek stained with blood.

The sight roused all his energies, and with desperate eagerness he fairly tore the great piece of wood away, so that she was released from its cruel pressure.

Raising her senseless form in his arms, he tenderly carried it away from the scattered fragments of the car and laid it gently down at the foot of the embankment.

He was unwilling to believe that Florence was dead, though as far as he could determine she showed no signs of life.

It seemed too hard and cruel that one so young and fair should be thus rudely hurried out of existence.

He dented in the crown of the soft hat he wore and filled the space with water from the lake.

He sprinkled her face, rubbed her temples, and exerted himself to the best of his knowledge and ability to awaken some signs of life.

The task seemed hopeless, and he was on the verge of despair, when an almost imperceptible sigh gladdened his heart, and caused him to renew his exertions with greater vigor than ever.

With his handkerchief he washed away the blood stains and found that she was only slightly cut above the ear.

He continued to bathe her face and chafe her hands till the girl opened her eyes.

Her bewildered gaze rested on his face.

"Why, where am I, and what has happened?" she whispered.

"The car we were aboard left the track, tumbled down the embankment, and the last car was flung on top of it, crushing it like an eggshell. How do you feel? I hope you are not injured."

"I don't know," she replied, faintly. "I don't feel any pain, but I seem to be very weak. You have been bathing my face and trying to help me all you could, haven't you?"

"Yes. I wouldn't have any harm happen to you for the world," he said, so earnestly that a faint blush of color momentarily tinged her cheeks.

"You are very good," she answered, gratefully, giving him a look that sent his blood coursing through his veins.

"Do you think you can stand up if I support you?" he asked, eagerly.

"I will try," she replied.

He helped her up, and leaning against him she walked the length of a car.

For the first time Harry looked about him to ascertain the extent of the calamity.

He saw the engine, with the forward part of the train, backing down the track.

Only the two rear cars had been precipitated over the embankment, the accident having been caused by the breaking of an axle on the car in which he and Florence had been seated.

The coupling connecting this car with the one ahead had given way, and the broken car had jumped the rails, carrying the rear one with it, while the rest of the train dashed on toward Paradise, half a mile away.

"I guess you haven't suffered any serious injury," said Harry, as they came to a standstill, and Florence began to show some interest in what was going on around them.

"I am beginning to feel very much better," she replied, with a little smile.

"You had a very narrow escape," he said. "I found you pinned under a big piece of the car roof."

"Is it possible!" she cried, with a shudder.

"Come! I will show it to you."

He led her back to the spot where the debris lay in hopeless confusion at the water's edge, and pointed out the particular bit of wreckage to which he had referred.

"Did you really lift that all by yourself?" she asked, in astonishment.

"I did."

"I don't see how you ever did it," glancing admiringly at his stalwart form.

"Nor I, now I look at it again. I must have been very much excited and upset when I saw you lying underneath it. I think I should have tried to move the whole car under the circumstances. I was awfully afraid that you had been killed, you looked so white and silent, with a streak of blood on your cheek. I don't know what I should have done if you had really been fatally injured."

Florence saw the tell-tale moisture in his eyes, and she

felt that she had never liked the boy half so much as she did at that moment.

"I am very grateful to you," she said, with a quiver in her voice. "I believe you have really saved my life. Papa and mamma will never be able to thank you half enough."

"Oh, I don't want any thanks," he answered, hastily. "I didn't do any more than I ought to under the circumstances. I am very glad I was able to do so much."

"It isn't everybody that would have done so much for me, and I appreciate it."

Florence now felt so much recovered from the shock she had sustained that she was able to ascend the embankment to the track.

The conductor of the train was now going around among the passengers of the wrecked cars taking notes of the injuries the different persons had sustained.

The most wonderful part of it all was that nobody had either been killed or even seriously hurt, in spite of the appalling nature of the accident.

This seemed almost incredible after you had taken a look at the splintered car which had caused the trouble.

However, such was the fortunate result of the derailment, and though several ladies had fainted, they were now revived sufficiently to be assisted on board of the waiting train.

Harry found a double seat for himself and Florence, and then the train proceeded on to its destination.

Of course, when the news of the accident reached Rushville by telegraph, and was posted up on the newspaper bulletin boards, it created a good deal of excitement in town.

The words, "No one seriously injured," was hailed with a feeling of relief, but the wreck added another black mark against the ruling management of the Lakeshore Railroad.

Many indignant townspeople declared that they had expected something like this would happen on the road owing to the way things were being run, while others said nothing would induce them to patronize the line when they could get to the other end of the lake by boat.

Finally the train ran into the depot, and a big crowd was on hand to sympathize with the passengers who had been on the ill-fated cars.

Harry insisted on seeing Florence safely home in an electric car, and then she insisted that he should come in and explain everything to her mother.

Of course, Mrs. Ashley was horrified at the peril through which her only child had passed, and was proportionately grateful to Harry for what he had done.

Before Harry took his leave Mr. Ashley came home, and the boy had to go all over his story again.

"I hope you understand that we are all deeply grateful to you for helping Florence," said Mr. Ashley, with great emotion. "We shall never forget it as long as we live."

We need hardly say that Florence accompanied Harry to the door to say the last word to him.

Whatever it was, it is certain he went away feeling very happy indeed.

The next day he called at Mr. Ashley's place of business and had a long talk with him about the Lakeshore Railroad, in which Mr. Ashley was a stockholder to the extent of three thousand shares.

Harry outlined the plans he and his young friends had decided upon, and easily persuaded Florence's father to pledge his support at the coming annual meeting.

"That settles the business," said Harry to himself, after he had left Mr. Ashley's store. "Mr. Ashley will back us, and with the proxies I have secured from those who cannot be present at the meeting, we will be able to elect our own Board of Directors and take the control of the road out of the hands of Parsons Thorndyke."

CHAPTER III.

THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE STOCKHOLDERS OF THE LAKESHORE RAILROAD.

The general offices of the Lakeshore Railroad were in Rushville, and in the board room, on the second floor of the building, the stockholders of the company gathered one sunshiny afternoon to attend the annual meeting.

The absence of Mrs. Hastings, as well as the presence of Harry Hastings, was noted by Mr. Thorndyke, and he asked the boy if his mother had sent him to act for her in her capacity of guardian.

"Yes, sir," replied Harry, politely.

"Then you have her voting proxy in your possession?"

"I have."

The gentleman was satisfied, for he had not the slightest suspicion that Harry Hastings was the head and front of the opposition.

He was satisfied Mrs. Hastings had instructed her son to cast the weight of his 25,000 shares of stock in favor of the existing board.

Had he learned the truth at that moment he would have had a fit.

He and his associates noticed the subdued air of expectation among the other stockholders as the room filled up.

This warned them that there was something unusual in the wind; but confident that they controlled enough stock to win, they were prepared to face the music.

At three o'clock, when Parsons Thorndyke called the meeting to order, every stockholder, or his representative, was present.

The secretary opened the proceedings by calling the roll.

Harry Hastings practically represented himself, while Alonzo Gray stood in that capacity for Walter Whipple's interests, and Jared Hawks, a lawyer, was there to look after Lawrence Hawks' rights.

When the name of John Baxter, of Delhi Junction, was called, Harry got up and said that he had been empowered to represent that gentleman, and that he had his proxy to vote for him in his pocket.

Mr. Thorndyke smiled at this, for he believed Mr. Baxter's shares would now be voted for him and his friends.

After the roll-call the minutes of the previous meeting were read and approved.

Some routine business was disposed of, and then the president arose and read his annual report.

It was observed that Jared Hawks and others made notes as Parsons Thorndyke proceeded.

When he had finished, Mr. Hawks got up and asked the president to explain quite a number of points in his report, which Mr. Thorndyke did with great suaveness.

As soon as he had finished questioning the president, Jared Hawks took up a paper and began a speech, in which he referred to the steadily decreasing business of the Lake-shore Railroad; to the careless way in which trains were being run, without the slightest regard for the feelings of the public; to the ridiculous economies practiced by Cyrus Gates, the new superintendent, and to a dozen other things which reflected on the present management.

He went on to say that in his opinion the president's report was far from satisfactory; that it omitted, or glossed over, important facts which the stockholders ought to know and understand.

He had asked the president to explain these things, and the explanation had been very unsatisfactory.

He said he would submit to the meeting a few glaring errors on the part of the management which he had recently found out.

Whereupon he read out all that Harry Hastings had discovered during his quiet investigation of the company's affairs.

The disclosure carried surprise and indignation to the ranks of the opposition and consternation to Parsons Thorndyke and his allies.

They could not imagine how these points could have leaked out, while Thorndyke himself was at his wit's end how to answer them.

He was quite warm under the collar when Jared Hawks sat down, and he arose to defend himself from this avalanche of charges.

As a matter of fact, he had no real defense, and in place of it put up a big bluff.

But bluffs didn't go with the present temper of the opposition.

They wanted honest explanations, and as they couldn't get them, several of the more indignant ones got up in turn and vigorously attacked the president and his administration.

Parsons Thorndyke and his associates were stunned by the rough manner in which the speakers handled the present management, and several of them got up and endeavored to refute the arguments brought forward.

The opposition, however, had all the logic on their side, and all the facts, too.

They demanded a new Board of Directors, and were prepared to put their own ticket in the field.

It was clearly a fight to the finish.

The Thorndyke crowd were willing to accept the gage of battle, for they felt sure of victory.

But what a surprise was in store for them.

And it was a pretty rough jolt, too.

Parsons Thorndyke handed the secretary the regular ticket to read out.

It contained the names of all the present directors, and no others.

Then Jared Hawks got up and handed in the opposition ticket.

The first name on the list caused the secretary to rub his eyes with surprise.

The second and third likewise.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Hawks," he said, after wiping his glasses. "Am I to understand that this is your ticket? Surely it is a joke, is it not?"

"That is our ticket, sir," replied Mr. Hawks. "And I think you will find that it is no joke. We propose to elect that ticket if we have votes enough, and it is my impression that we have."

"Read the ticket, Mr. Jones," said Parsons Thorndyke, wondering what there was about the opposition ticket which had given rise to the secretary's remarks.

He was not long kept in ignorance.

"Gentlemen," said Mr. Jones, rising, "I will read the ticket submitted by Mr. Hawks, and you will take such action in reference to it as you think it deserves."

There was a slight tinge of sarcasm in his tones, which was not lost on the stockholders.

"Harry Hastings," began the secretary.

"What's that?" gasped Parsons Thorndyke, jumping to his feet. "Read that name again, if you please!"

The secretary did so.

"Mr. Hawks," glared the angry president, "what is the meaning of this? Are you making game of this meeting that you head your ticket with the name of a boy?"

"No, sir," replied Jared Hawks. "This matter is altogether too serious for you to suppose such a thing. Harry Hastings is our first choice for one of the directors of this road. He is entitled to a seat on the Board, provided he can secure a majority of the votes to be cast at this meeting, as he is the largest stockholder in the road."

"But, sir, I object to his name being put forward in such a connection," cried Mr. Thorndyke, furiously.

"On what ground, sir?" demanded Mr. Hawks.

"Because he is under age, is legally represented by his mother, and consequently has no right to vote his stock himself."

"Your points are not well taken, Mr. Thorndyke. Harry Hastings is not representing himself in a legal sense at this meeting. He is representing himself only through his mother, who is not present. He holds her proxy to vote as she has directed him to vote. As he heads the opposition ticket, decided upon many days ago with the full concurrence of Mrs. Hastings, he will naturally vote his 25,000 shares against the regular ticket."

The Thorndyke faction were staggered.

"I shall contest this election in the courts," thundered Mr. Thorndyke.

"That is your privilege," replied Jared Hawks, quietly. "But let me warn you right here, sir, that if the election goes against you, and you bring the matter into the courts, we will hand in to the newspapers a full account of the inner workings of your management of the road, which we now hold in our possession. Furthermore, we will bring legal proceedings against you in that connection, and you will be required to make explicit explanations that you do not seem willing or able to make to this meeting. You will be compelled to bring the books of the company into court, and we will compel Cyrus Gage to go on the stand and answer for every order he has issued since he became superintendent of this company. Now, sir, you understand the position we have taken. The Lakeshore Railroad has been grossly mismanaged since the death of George Hastings, your predecessor, and the time has come when this thing has got to be stopped, or the road will pass into the hands of a receiver—a situation that we look upon as entirely unnecessary."

Jared Hawks sat down.

Parsons Thorndyke, white with rage, endeavored to make a scathing reply, but the intensity of his feelings prevented him from uttering a word, and he collapsed like a broken reed.

The secretary then went on to read the other names, which included Walter Whipple and Lawrence Hawks.

Two tellers were appointed to take the votes and count them.

Then the election of a Board of Directors proceeded.

When the votes were all in they were canvassed, and the result announced as follows:

The Regular ticket received 35,000 votes, the Opposition 65,000.

The Thorndyke faction had been ignominiously defeated.

CHAPTER IV.

HARRY HASTINGS AND HIS ASSOCIATES START IN TO RUN THE LAKESHORE RAILROAD.

Exactly one week from the election of the new Board of Directors the Thorndyke regime came to an end, and the day before that happy event occurred the new Board met at the residence of Jared Hawks and elected Harry Hastings president, Walter Whipple vice-president, and Lawrence Hawks secretary and treasurer of the road.

At ten o'clock on the second morning thereafter the three boys met together in the new president's private office, which adjoined the Board room.

"It seems strange to think that we have actually started in to run the Lakeshore Railroad ourselves," said Walt Whipple, with a rather sober face, for the responsibility devolving on their three young heads was beginning to dawn upon his mind.

"I hope you aren't getting worried over the situation already," laughed Harry.

"We have assumed a great responsibility," replied Walt, regarding his friend earnestly.

"Of course we have, and like bright American boys I trust we shall be equal to the emergency. We've put our shoulders to the wheel, and we've got to make good. The public may have their doubts at first, but we must brush those doubts aside. The proof of the pudding is in the eating, and after we have demonstrated that this road can keep all its agreements, both with passengers and freight, an important consideration wilfully neglected by the late management, I guess we shall secure and hold the confidence of the community."

"I shall do my share to attain that end," said Walt, energetically.

"And you may count on me for all I'm worth," put in Larry Hawks.

"I know that I can count on both of you. Certainly it is to our individual interests to put the Lakeshore on a dividend-paying basis again; and I see no reason why it should not be done. That will make us solid with our stockholders, two-thirds of whom voted us into power."

"We only required the votes of 5,100 outside shares to elect us, and yet we received 20,000," said Walt.

"The opposition stockholders were anxious to get rid of the Thorndyke push at any price, and were willing to take chances on us, in preference to permitting the old Board to continue their ruinous management."

"Well," said Larry Hawks, "I guess we can't get down to business any too soon. What is going to be your first official act, Harry?"

"Call in my stenographer, and I'll show you."

A pretty miss of seventeen entered the president's office.

"Miss Wagner, you know me in a general way pretty well, I guess," said Hastings.

The young lady smiled and said she did.

"I wish to notify you officially that I have been elected president of the Lakeshore Railroad."

Miss Wagner was evidently surprised at the news.

She knew there had been a change in the management of the road, but did not expect to see a boy in the president's chair.

She bowed and said nothing.

"Allow me to introduce you to Walter Whipple, the new vice-president."

She bowed to Walt, and he returned it politely.

"And this is our new secretary and treasurer, Lawrence Hawks."

The introduction was acknowledged by both.

"Now, Miss Wagner, while you are my personal stenographer, you will also render a similar service to these gentlemen, also. I see you have your note-book with you. I wish you to take down some dictation at once."

Miss Wagner opened her book and got ready for business.

The first official act of the new president was to dictate a letter to Cyrus Gage, asking for his immediate resignation as superintendent of the road.

"Who are you going to have for superintendent?" asked Walt.

"I'm going to put Alston Brown back in his old job," replied Harry.

"That's first class," said Walt, "but are you sure you can get him back? He's general manager of the Davis Construction Company now, you know."

"I've had several talks with him on the subject," answered Harry, "and he has agreed to return to the Lakeshore on the first of next year."

"Six months from now."

"Yes; but in the meantime I'll have to have another man. Now I have decided to ask you to accept the position, Walt."

"I'm afraid I don't know enough about railroading to fill such a responsible position even temporarily."

"Oh, you'll manage it. Mr. Brown has agreed to post you, and maintain constant communication with you, so that when you want advice all you have to do will be to call on him, or ring him up on the 'phone, state your difficulty, and he'll straighten it out."

"All right. I'll take hold, then. You can bet your life I'll see that trains run on time after this, and that freight gets through according to agreement."

"That's what we want," said Harry, energetically.

"Why did Thorndyke discharge Mr. Brown?" asked Larry Hawks.

"On the score of economy."

"Ho! I don't believe that," said Walt.

"Neither do I," remarked Harry. "The real reason was he wanted a man like Cyrus Gage in the place—a man who would carry out his schemes to the letter. Gage has done that, and the present condition of the road is the result."

Harry then dictated a letter to Moses Goodfellow, a personal friend of Parsons Thorndyke, who was attorney for the company, asking him to resign at once.

He then appointed Jared Hawks in Mr. Goodfellow's place, the appointment to go into effect as soon as the resignation of the latter was in his hands.

Mr. Austin, the general passenger and freight agent, was notified that his services would be dispensed with at the end of the month, and Harry then dictated an offer of the position to a man recommended by Alston Brown.

The master mechanic, trainmaster, and one or two other minor officials, were informed that the Lakeshore Railroad would have no further use for them at the end of the month, and letters were dictated to available men also recommended by Mr. Brown.

"That will be all for the present, Miss Wagner," said Harry, with a smile, and the girl withdrew.

"Gee whiz! You are making a clean sweep after a fashion, aren't you?" grinned Walt.

"There are lots more to go yet," replied Hastings, "but they are small fry."

"There'll be a ruction on the road, I'm thinking," said Hawks.

"I'm not worrying myself about what disgruntled employees may think," remarked the new president. "I have

consulted with Mr. Brown, and, acting on his advice, have decided on my policy. I am going over the road this afternoon on the 1.15, due at Delhi Junction at 4.15. I think you had better accompany me, Walt. As for you, Larry, you have lots to do getting yourself familiar with the duties heretofore performed by your predecessor. You have a nice and comfortable office on this floor, and I advise you to get to work."

"That's a pretty good hint," laughed Hawks.

"Well, a nod is as good as a wink to a blind horse," grinned Harry.

"All right. I'll take my departure."

"Wait a moment, Larry. I want you to prepare and send out a circular letter to all the employees of the road, notifying them officially of the change in the management, and what will be expected of them in the future. Make it short, sweet, and to the point."

"I'll do it. Anything else?"

"I have here a new time-table, corresponding with the changes lately announced in the running time of the D. W. & P. and the P. D. & Q. It was prepared by Mr. Brown. Send it to the printer right away, as this schedule will go into effect in three days, when the changes occur in the arrivals and departures of the Atlantic and Pacific expresses at Delhi Junction, and the summer service begins on the P. D. & Q. You can prepare and have a suitable advertisement inserted in the papers notifying the public of the change in our running time after next Sunday."

"I'll attend to it."

"I want you also to send letters to the general passenger and freight agents of the two trunk lines with which we do business notifying them that hereafter all passenger connections will surely be made on time; also that all freight will be promptly and expeditiously handled both ways between Delhi Junction and Rushville."

"All right, Harry."

"Put an advertisement in the Rushville and Brookport papers to the effect that an improved freight and passenger service will go into immediate effect between those two places, and that hereafter there will be no delay in transit. Understand?"

"Perfectly."

"There are a lot of other things I want you to attend to, but I guess that will keep you pretty busy until you see me again to-morrow morning."

"I guess you're going to make Larry hustle," laughed Walt.

"We've all got to hustle, Walt. It's no fool job running a railroad, especially one that has been almost run into the ground by what I call nothing else than rascally management. You know as well as I do that Parsons Thorndyke would have contested our election if he wasn't afraid of having the inner workings of his management of this road brought to light and sifted by the courts. He went out of office like a lamb because he knew that he was guilty of acts that would not stand investigation. But I am not

sure but we may expect to hear from him in some way we sha'n't like before long."

"What can he do?"

"Lots of things that will have a tendency to hurt the road if we don't meet them promptly."

"Name one, for instance."

"He may circulate reports about the youthfulness and inexperience of the new officers of the road. Insinuate that passengers ought not to trust their lives to a railroad run by boys. Sneer at the ability of young fellows like us being able to transport freight safely from Delhi Junction to Rushville, and similar kinds of yarns calculated to shake public confidence in the Lakeshore."

"It wouldn't be well for him if we caught him at that kind of work," said Walt, indignantly.

"He's too old a bird to allow himself to be caught within the meshes of the law," replied Hastings. "He'll do it, if he does it at all, in an underhanded way that will make it difficult to trace the libel to his door. We must keep our ears and eyes peeled for trouble of that sort, and then meet it with arguments—acts will be better—that will brand such statements as malicious lies."

"I think we can depend on the papers giving us a fair show to prove what we can do," said Walt. "That seems to be the tone of their remarks on the new situation so far."

"I think we can, too. They've roasted Thorndyke for months past, and he gave them the merry ha! ha! Now they will be glad to get square by praising the new management, if the new management deserves it. Well, let's go to dinner. We've got to take the 1.15 train for Delhi Junction, you know, and we want to be on time."

Harry signed the bunch of letters Miss Wagner brought in to him, and then putting on his hat left the office with Walt Whipple.

CHAPTER V.

PREPARED FOR TROUBLE.

The conductor of the 1.15 P. M. accommodation, south-bound, was rather surprised when Harry Hastings introduced himself as the new president of the road and Walt Whipple as the new vice-president.

In fact he was rather incredulous, until Harry showed him documents establishing the fact that he was not only president, but general manager as well.

The man was clearly astonished, but he immediately treated the boys with all the respect their positions called for.

He was one of the old conductors that had not been superseded by Cyrus Gage, and Harry believed he was a thoroughly competent official.

The train reached Brookport on schedule time, and Hastings and Whipple got off and took the branch line to Sweetbriar.

The conductor of this train seemed to regard Harry's statement that he was the president of the road as a huge

joke, and was rather taken aback when Hastings produced his documents.

The boys inspected the company's property at Sweetbriar, and made the acquaintance of their superintendent of construction, who had his office there.

He invited them to go down the road as far as the track was laid, on a handcar, and they went.

The track was being put down four miles west of Sweetbriar, and it was expected that trains would be running to Loon River within six weeks.

The boys returned to Brookport, had supper there, and took the north-bound express which left Delhi Junction at 7 P. M., and made its only stop at Brookport at 8.35, arriving at Rushville thirty minutes later, in time to transfer through passengers to the east-bound night express on the P. D. & Q.

For the balance of the week the three boys had their hands full getting the road into proper shape for the new schedule which was to go into effect on Monday.

Walt Whipple performed the duties of superintendent, frequently consulting Alston Brown over the telephone, and acting on his advice.

Hastings had spotted a number of Gage's employes while engaged upon his investigation of the road's affairs, two months before the election, and he handed his list to Walt, with the recommendation that the men be discharged.

The acting superintendent fired them off-hand, and as a consequence some threats were made against the road and its new officers.

The young president put it squarely up to Walt to see that the new schedule was lived up to, and that all freight, both local and through, was put through without unnecessary delay.

As a consequence, Walt, who had a good bit of bulldog grit in his make-up, soon made his presence felt all along the line, and it was astonishing how differently things moved now to what they did under Cyrus Gage.

The first of the month soon came around, and then quite a number of new faces made their appearance on the road; among these were a new trainmaster and a new master mechanic.

That morning Whipple walked into the president's office.

"Hello, Walt! exclaimed Harry, wheeling about in his chair. "I see you're keeping things up to the mark."

"Bet your life I am. Did you see what the Rushville *Mercury* said this morning about the road?"

"No. We don't take the *Mercury*. What was it?"

"I've got it with me—I mean the clipping. Read it for yourself."

Walt took out his pocketbook, picked something out of it and handed it to the young president.

Harry read it with a smile.

"Highly complimentary, isn't it?" he said.

It was indeed.

The article spoke about the greatly improved service

on the Lakeshore since the new officers took charge of the road.

The editor said that the old go-as-you-please system had been done entirely away with, and that the road was once more being run in the interest of the traveling public as well as to the satisfaction of the shippers and merchants of both Rushville and Brookport.

Rushville should be proud, he said, that it numbered three such smart and progressive boys among its residents as the new officers of the company.

"I should say it is complimentary," replied Walt, smiling broadly. "But I guess we deserve it all right. Notices like that will do us a heap of good. I know that we are carrying more passengers to Brookport than we did a week ago, and that the Navigation Company is beginning to suffer in that direction. A man would sooner pay us \$1.25 for a round-trip ticket taking him to Brookport in forty-five minutes, with several chances to return during the day, than pay the steamboat \$1.00 for an excursion passage by boat, taking one hour and forty-five minutes, and only one opportunity to return the same day."

"And our freight traffic to and from Brookfield is looking up considerably also since I reduced the tariff to its former level," said Harry, complacently. "We are getting back our old business rapidly, and before long the Navigation people will be down to the bed rock, same as they were when my father died."

"Your prediction that we should probably hear from Parsons Thorndyke in a way not to our liking hasn't materialized," said Walt, with a grin.

"Oh, it isn't too late yet, by any means. He has probably been lying back on his oars, watching the trend of events. I am satisfied he felt reasonably certain that we would tangle the road all up in a week or two. As soon as he thoroughly realizes that the Lakeshore is booming instead of going backward, I'll bet the old fox will set his wits to work to do us some nasty turn."

"Oh, he be hanged! He's done all the harm he'll ever do to the Lakeshore. He is on the outside now, and he'll stay there for good. We turned the tables on that push very neatly, and we can snap our fingers at them."

"Don't be too sure of that, Walt. I was talking to Mr. Brooke yesterday. He has given us back all his business you know. It is his opinion that Parsons Thorndyke is largely interested in the Brookport Navigation Company. He heard indirectly that Thorndyke obtained a controlling interest in the company about the time he became president of the Lakeshore. He got the stock cheap as the railroad had about run the navigation company into the soup. Mr. Brooks thinks that Thorndyke's plan was to put the Lakeshore road into the hands of a receiver friendly to his interests, who would so manipulate things that the road would have to be sold in the interests of the bondholders. The Navigation Company would become its purchaser, and the original stockholders be wiped out."

"A man who would work such a game as that is a scoundrel!" cried Walt, indignantly. "I suppose he thought

because you, I and Larry owned something over two-fifths of this road between us that it would be a smart business move to do us out of it."

"Oh, he isn't the only man in the world who has tried to gobble up everything in sight. That kind of sharp practice is going on every day among our kings of finance."

"That's right," replied Walt.

"Now in respect to Thorndyke getting back at us for his late defeat, if he's really heavily interested in the steamboat stock our cutting into their business as we've started to do again is bound to rile him more than ever, and he would try in every way he can to head us off. If not by fair means, it is possible he may resort to questionable methods, under cover, of course."

"With the law on our side, he'll be taking desperate chances to do anything of that kind."

"Some men are willing to take desperate chances to accomplish their ends."

"He'll never accomplish his ends, either by fair means or foul—not while we are running this road, bet your life!" said Walt, with a determined air.

"I'm not taking any chances in that respect," replied the young president. "When you discharged that bunch of workmen the other day, I heard that some of them made threats against the road, so I hired a couple of good detectives and sent one of them to Delhi Junction, while the other is now keeping track of things at Brookport. I have received word from the latter that Cyrus Gage has been seen talking to a number of our ex-employees, and the detective has also found out that Thorndyke meets Gage at the Brookport Hotel. This has a suspicious look, though there may be nothing in it."

"I suppose you haven't any idea what kind of a move Thorndyke might make against us?"

"If he can in any way shake the public confidence in our line, he'll do it."

"How can he do that? He dares not publish any false reports, for these could probably be traced to him, and we could sue him for libel."

"Well, I'll tell you what I think he's up to now. Through his confidential agents I believe he's trying to stir up a wicked feeling among the men we discharged, and induce them to do some desperate act against the road in revenge for losing their jobs."

"Some desperate act!" exclaimed Walt, uneasily.

"Sure. They might set fire to our roundhouse at Brookport, for instance; or they might destroy the bridge this side of Tyrone, and thus interrupt our traffic."

"What good would that do them? They'd be tracked down and sent to State prison for some years."

"But Thorndyke, if he was at the bottom of the scheme, would have accomplished his purpose. It would be nothing to him that the fools he used for catspaws were punished."

"But surely we could bring out his connection with the affair at the trial of the men, don't you think?"

"No, I don't. He'll manage to keep safe enough in the background. His agents could incite the dissatisfied men

without actually directing them to do anything unlawful. They could accomplish all they wanted by hints and guarded suggestions to men partly under the influence of liquor. Don't you fret but if anything like this takes place the real instigators will keep their skirts free of all complicity in the affair."

"You've shown a clear head by hiring those detectives, Harry. We can't be any too careful. If traffic should be interrupted it would cause us lots of trouble, and under some circumstances might give the road a black eye."

"That's how I figured. The bridge near Tyrone is now being watched night and day, and the day watchman is a telegraph operator, who sleeps at a farm house less than half a mile away. He has instruments with him for sending a message to our Brookport detective at the first sign of trouble."

"By the jumping spoon! You seem to be covering every emergency, Harry!"

"That's what I'm expected to do, isn't it?"

At that moment Miss Wagner knocked at the door and entered with a telegram addressed to Hastings.

It had come over the company's private wire from Brookport.

Harry tore it open and read as follows:

"Brookport, July 9, 19—.

"Mr. Harry Hastings, President Lakeshore Railroad.

"Dear Sir: Come on to Brookport at once. Fear trouble. Have just received a message from Pixley at Tyrone Bridge that looks bad. Answer.

JORDAN."

Hastings looked at his watch.

"I must take the 11.30 local for Brookport," he said, tossing the dispatch to Walter, who read it, and whistled.

Harry drew a pad toward him and scribbled a few lines.

"Get that off for me at once, Walt," he said, handing the message to the acting superintendent. "I've just got time to make the train."

He grabbed his hat and walked hurriedly from his office.

CHAPTER VI.

SAVING THE BRIDGE AT TYRONE CREEK.

Harry Hastings reached Brookport at 12.20 P. M.

He found Jordan, the detective, standing on the platform.

The train was a through accommodation to Delhi Junction.

It stopped twenty minutes in Brookport that the passengers might get a hurried meal at the station restaurant.

"Well, Mr. Jordan," said Harry, taking the detective aside, "let me hear what's in the wind."

"An hour ago I got a message from Pixley at Tyrone Bridge. He said a woman who lives in the village of Tyrone, one mile south, brought him word of the presence in that place of a crowd of railroad men, who were drinking in the rear of her husband's store. She said they were in an ugly humor, and were uttering all sorts of threats against the Lakeshore Road. She believed they were ripe

for mischief against the company's property, and that they were plotting some act of destruction. She was unable to overhear anything definite, but became so nervous that she started to walk to the siding three miles north of the bridge, where she knew there was a switchman on duty, in order to tell him her fears. She met Pixley at the bridge, and finding out that he was an employe of the railroad she told him her story. Pixley thinks that the men's objective point is the bridge, and he judges that they may make a move in that direction before the arrival of north-bound accommodation from Delhi which passes the bridge at 1.30 P. M. while this south-bound train is waiting at the siding above for it to go by."

"Have you heard from Pixley since that message came over the wire?"

"I have called him up twice and he reports all well."

"Well, call him up again and see what he has to say. Tell him that we will be down on No. 3, due at the siding at 1.30, with a bunch of men, but that the train will run ahead of its schedule time in order to reach the bridge by 1.20. That will allow time for the conductor to back up to the siding after he has left us at the bridge, and if nothing has happened the line will be clear for No. 4 to pass north."

"All right, sir," replied the detective. "And now about the men we're to take along."

"I'll attend to that right away," answered Hastings, turning on his heel.

He first hunted up the conductor of the waiting train and told him that he might be required to hold No. 3 a few minutes as he was going to take a number of men to Tyrone Bridge.

Then he went to the yard master's office and told him what he required.

Inside of ten minutes a dozen stout hands, each provided with a heavy wooden club, were marshalled before the young president, and Harry marched them on to the platform and into the smoker.

The engineer received his instructions, the train pulled out of Brookport on time, and was soon speeding southward at a rate that would bring it to the bridge in three-quarters of an hour, or ten minutes before the north-bound accommodation was due there.

The train was hardly clear of Brookport before an unexpected event happened.

The conductor was suddenly taken ill.

Harry sent the detective through the cars to see if there was a physician on board.

A Rushville doctor was on the train, fortunately, and his services were called into requisition.

While he was attending to the sick man, Harry put on the conductor's cap and taking his punch went through the cars on the usual ticket tour.

"Nothing like making oneself useful in an emergency," he laughed when he rejoined the detective in the smoker. "Joyce looks like a pretty sick man. One of the brakemen will have to take the train on to Delhi Junction."

"What's the matter with him?"

"An attack of heart failure."

The train passed the siding at full speed after the engineer had signalled the switchman for a clear track, and four minutes later approached the bridge.

Harry and the detective went out on the platform and looked ahead.

"By George!" cried Hastings, in a startled tone, "We haven't reached here a moment too soon."

A crowd of rough looking men were gathered on that side of the bridge tearing up a section of the rails and ties, while others beyond them were piling brushwood and other inflammable material against the upper works of the wooden bridge which spanned Tyrone Creek.

The engineer whistled down brakes, and brought the train to a stand-still.

A good part of the crowd quit work and gathered in a hostile way around the locomotive.

The young president of the road was the first to swing himself to the ground.

Detective Jordan was at his heels.

"Wait here, and when you see me wave my hands, send the men up at double-quick," said the young head of the road, who was grit from his feet up.

"All right, sir," replied the detective, stepping back on the platform to order the railroad men to hold themselves in readiness for business.

Undismayed Hastings advanced and faced the threatening mob.

A chorus of hoots and angry ejaculations was hurled at him, while one of the men raised the heavy hammer he carried and started forward as if he meant to strike the boy.

"What is the meaning of this, you rascals?" cried Harry, sternly.

The man with the hammer, who appeared to be the leader of the undisciplined crowd, regarded the lad with an insulting grin.

"Well, my little cockchaffer, are you one of the new conductors on the Lakeshore?" he said, insolently. "I don't wonder that when kids fresh from the nursery try to manage a railroad that they hire schoolboys like you to run the trains."

The man's sarcastic remarks were greeted with a burst of rude laughter from his companions.

"You don't seem to realize the serious position you have placed yourselves in," answered Hastings, with flashing eyes. "You have wantonly torn up the tracks and are preparing to set fire to the bridge. This is a state prison offense, and you will all pay dearly for your outrageous conduct."

"We will, will we?" sneered the bearded leader, angrily.

"Who's goin' to put us in prison, I'd like to know?"

"I'm going to do it," replied Harry, fearlessly.

"You! Just listen to the game cock crow."

A chorus of hoots rose in the air.

"Yes. I'm going to put every one of you rascals in jail for this job," said the brave boy, unflinchingly. "My name is Hastings. I'm president of the Lakeshore Railroad. If you think because I'm a boy that I don't know how to treat such scum as you, you're mightily mistaken, as I'll show you in a few minutes."

This plucky defiance not only astonished but thoroughly angered the wreckers.

They started toward the boy with upraised fists and such weapons as they carried in their hands, apparently disposed to make short work of the young fellow who showed such nerve under their very noses.

Harry saw that the crisis was at hand and he waved the signal to the detective who was watching for it.

In another moment the bunch of railroad men, led by Jordan, poured out of the smoker and came dashing to the front.

At that moment came the shrill whistle of the north-bound accommodation on the other side of the bridge, where the track had also been torn up to bring it to a stop.

The mob of rascals were taken completely by surprise by the sudden appearance of the armed railroad yardmen who were coming at them in a way that meant business.

The wreckers began to waver, and show symptoms of scattering, but their burly leader yelled to them to stand firm and fight it out.

Thus encouraged they lined up and met the attack with a desperate earnestness that told the railroad men that they had no easy job before them.

But Harry and the detective didn't propose to give the scoundrels any chance to win out if they could help it.

They were both armed with revolvers, and stepping to the front they drew their weapons and ordered the mob to throw up their hands.

The leader made a vicious lunge at Harry with his hammer, and the blow would probably have taken effect and laid him out, but for Jordan, who fired at the fellow's arm, shattering his wrist.

The heavy hammer fell to the ground and the ruffian uttered a volley of yells.

Harry thrust his revolver into the face of the nearest rascal in front and ordered him to surrender.

His face turned a sickly white and he threw up his hands.

The young president marched him back to the baggage car and gave him in charge of the baggage man, who bound his hands and pushed him down on a trunk.

Harry then rushed back to the fray, where his men, under Jordan's leadership, had already taken half a dozen prisoners, including the husky leader, and had put the rest to flight across the bridge, where they were met and some of them stopped by the conductor and the train crew of No. 4.

The fight was over, a dozen prisoners were taken altogether, and the bridge saved from destruction.

CHAPTER VII.

HARRY HASTINGS CALLS ON MISS FLORENCE ASHLEY.

Pixley, the telegraph operator and temporary watchman at Tyrone Bridge, was found bound and gagged in the bushes.

He explained that the rascals had come upon him unawares, soon after he had received Jordan's message from Brookport that a force of employees were coming to the spot on the down accommodation.

The mob of wreckers had started in at once to tear up the track on both sides of the bridge, and to gather material to set fire to the wooden structure.

Pixley said he was comforted by the reflection that the railroad men would arrive in time to avert the carrying out of the nefarious project.

Train No. 3, the one which had brought Harry, the detective and the yardmen down from Brookport, was ordered back to the siding.

The prisoners were marched across the bridge and bundled into the baggage car of No. 4 to be carried to Rushville and jailed there.

Then the track was temporarily repaired, and the north-bound accommodation, with all hands on board, resumed its interrupted trip.

When it reached the siding where No. 3 was waiting for a clear track, it was brought to a stop while Hastings took a look in at the stricken conductor.

He found him greatly recovered, but still in no condition to resume the discharge of his duties, so the young president put a brakeman in charge, and directed him what to do when the train reached Delhi Junction.

No. 3 reached Brookport only five minutes behind its schedule time.

The yardmen were dismissed to the regular duties with the promise from Harry that the company would reward the zeal they had displayed in its service.

A locomotive, one flatcar and several track hands were sent to thoroughly repair the track at Tyrone Bridge.

Detective Jordan mounted guard over the prisoners in the baggage car, and went on with them to Rushville.

Three stops were made between Brookport and Rushville, the towns being Paradise, Lakeport and Waterloo.

At the latter place, six miles south of Rushville, while the baggage man was putting off a trunk, the prisoners made an unexpected demonstration and rush for the door.

Their hands had been bound, but two or three had managed to free themselves, and though Jordan drew his revolver he was upset and thrown out upon the platform.

Then a wild break was made by them to escape.

Eight out of the twelve succeeded in getting clear off, and among the fortunate ones was the burly leader, the most villainous of the lot, whose wrist had been badly injured by the bullet from the detective's revolver.

Jordan was much chagrined over the escape of so many

of his prisoners, and reported the fact to Hastings in a rather shamefaced way.

"Well, it can't be helped, I suppose," replied Harry, who, though manifestly much annoyed, did not call the man down for lack of vigilance. "I'll have to arrange with the police of Rushville to assist you in running the rascals down."

"I blame myself for their getting away," replied Jordan, rather dejectedly. "I thought I had them well in hand. That they would make such a sudden break at a bustling place like Waterloo I never dreamed for a moment."

"Such accidents will happen even to detectives," replied Harry, with a covert smile. "You must remedy it by hustling out and trying to get them back where they won't be able to do any harm for some time to come."

"I'll do that, sir," answered Jordan, readily, much relieved because his employer did not haul him over the coals.

"I'm specially anxious that you should catch that ring-leader—the ruffian who tried to down me with the hammer, and who you shot in the wrist. I consider him the most dangerous fellow in the crowd."

"He certainly is," nodded the detective. "He's got a bad eye. I believe he's capable of committing any crime."

The train reached Rushville at 3.15, on time, and the four prisoners remaining were marched to the city prison and locked up.

Then Harry accompanied Jordan to police headquarters where arrangements were soon made to send out several detectives to assist the railroad in recapturing the escaped prisoners.

It was after four o'clock when the young president reached his office.

He sent for Walt Whipple, and gave him the complete story of the day's events.

"You seem to have had a lively time of it while it lasted," said Walt with a grin.

"You can just guess we did. Those rascals are a tough set. I doubt very much if half of them ever worked on this road."

"Do you think Parsons Thorndyke was behind this attempt to destroy the bridge at Tyrone Creek?" asked Walt.

"I am not prepared to assert that he was; but the affair has a very suspicious look."

"It certainly has. They timed the job so as to hold up both the south-bound and north-bound accommodations which meet at the siding four miles north of the bridge. It was evidently planned to demoralize the road."

"It probably would have succeeded but for that Tyrone storekeeper's wife, who warned Pixley at the bridge that there was trouble in the air."

"The company must reward her, Harry."

"I will see that she's taken care of. She has proved herself a friend under trying circumstances, and is entitled to a suitable reward."

"It's a great pity so many of those rascals managed to

escape from the baggage car at Waterloo. Jordan must have been off his guard at the time."

"I didn't see any use of pulling him over the coals for it," replied Hastings. "Whether he's to blame or not he certainly did great service at the bridge, and in addition to that he saved me getting a cracked head."

That evening Harry dressed himself in his best suit and made a call on Florence Ashley.

Her residence was at a considerable distance from the Hastings's home, at the other end of town, in fact, and the quickest way to get there was by a trolley car which passed in front of the Lakeshore Railroad depot.

The freight yard, car shops and roundhouse adjoined the depot and backed upon the lake shore.

Harry reached the Ashley residence about eight o'clock and was warmly welcomed by the family, particularly by the young lady of the house.

"Really," she said laughingly, "I consider it quite an honor for you to call on me."

"How is that?" asked Harry, with a smile.

"Why, aren't you a real, live railroad magnate?"

"Hardly that," he answered, genially. "I'm only the president of the Lakeshore Railroad—a company that hasn't paid a dividend for a whole year."

"Oh, but it's going to pay dividends right along now," she replied archly.

"What makes you think it will?"

"Because it's now in the hands of a capable and honest management."

"You are very complimentary, Miss Florence. Permit me to thank you also in behalf of my able and hard-working associates, Walter Whipple and Lawrence Hawks. When I tell them what you have said I am seriously afraid they may drop dead from pure joy."

"That would be very sad, indeed," replied the charming little miss, with a rippling laugh.

"But honestly now, I don't think we quite deserve so much credit as you seem inclined to lavish upon us. We've only just started in to run the road, and we may end up in the soup before our term of office shall have expired."

"Impossible!" she replied, with a twinkle in her eye. "There's no such word as 'fail' in the lexicon that you boys use."

"I hope there isn't," answered Harry, earnestly. "And you are very kind to suggest its absence. All I can say is we mean to do our very best to put the road back where it was when my father was its president. I am satisfied it can be made to pay, and our aim is to make it a financial success."

"Do you know, Mr. Hastings, I am so confident that you will succeed that if I had any money to invest I'd put every cent of it into Lakeshore Railroad stock, and rest easy as to the result."

"Well, why don't you scrape up a few dollars and buy out Parsons Thorndyke. I heard this evening that he's

anxious to sell his little block, and will let it go cheap. He says he has no use for a road that's run by boys."

"Did he really say that?" opening her eyes.

"Such is the report. How true it is I am not willing to say."

"I'll tell papa. He has 5,000 shares already, and I guess he's willing to take chances on 5,000 more, if he can get them, judging by the way he talks."

"Your father helped vote us into office, Miss Florence, and I am very much obliged to him, notwithstanding the fact that we had enough votes already pledged to insure our winning. He was evidently not deterred by our youth from giving us that expression of his confidence."

"Papa says you're the smartest boy in Rushville, and," with a roguish glance, "I always think what papa thinks."

"You do me proud, Miss Florence," said Harry, rising from the chair he was sitting in, and making her a low bow, "and now perhaps I ought to tell you what I think."

"Oh, do," she cried, clapping her hands, "I'm just dying to know what you are thinking about."

"Then I will certainly oblige you. I think you are one of the most charming young ladies I have ever met."

"Oh!" she screamed, with a rosy blush. "That isn't fair."

"Isn't it? Then let us change the subject. Suppose you open the piano and play one or two of your latest pieces for me."

"Why certainly. I believe I have one new piece that you haven't heard me play," she said, rising and going to the instrument; "but I am afraid I shall not be able to do the composer justice."

"You will permit me to judge of that, Miss Florence. From what I have heard of your execution I can honestly say that if I was a musical composer I should regard it as a privilege to have you play my compositions."

"No boquets, please, Mr. Hastings," she said, with a merry laugh. "This new piece is called 'The Maiden's Dream.'"

It was a very pretty piece, and Harry said that he liked it very much indeed.

"You might diversify the programme with a song," he added.

"I'm afraid I'm not a remarkable success as a singer," she answered.

"You mean you want me to coax you to sing—is that it?" he grinned.

"Why, the idea! Coaxed, indeed! To punish you for that remark I will sing now, and the consequences be on your own head. What shall I sing? 'Where Silvery Mohawk Flows,' or 'Golden Autumn Time, Sweet Elaine'? Take your choice."

"Perhaps you will sing them both?"

"That will depend on whether you survive the first ordeal."

"I'll take my chance on that," he laughed.

Miss Ashley sang the first song so very charmingly that

Harry said he could stand that kind of punishment all night.

After she had sung the second one she asked him to oblige, which he did to her accompaniment, rendering "Milo" in great shape with her help in the chorus.

In this manner the two young people passed a very pleasant evening together, so pleasant indeed that Hastings somewhat overstepped his mark, and the half-past ten chime of the ormolu clock on the mantle rang out before he was aware how late it was.

Then he took his leave, promising to call that night week.

CHAPTER VIII.

A RASCALLY RENDEZVOUS.

There wasn't a trolley car in sight when Harry Hastings left the Ashley residence, so he started on down the street, expecting one to overtake him any minute.

After walking three blocks he turned into a cross street where the track ran, and there, right ahead, he saw a car stalled in the middle of the thoroughfare.

There was nobody on board except the motorman and conductor, and they were taking things easy inside.

Harry stepped on the platform and poked his head in at the door.

"What's the trouble?" he inquired of the conductor.

"Power is off," was the answer.

"Since when?"

"Half an hour."

"I suppose you've no idea when you'll get started up again?"

"Not the slightest. May be any moment."

"Or it may not be for an hour, or perhaps longer, is that it?"

"That's about the size of it."

"Then I guess I'll walk. I live at the other side of town, so I've got a good stretch ahead of me."

"You have my sympathy," grinned the conductor.

"Thanks. However, I know of a short cut through the back lots in the direction of the railroad which will reduce my tramp one-third. Good night."

Harry started off again at a swinging gait, and after walking a number of blocks along the well-lighted streets he turned off in the direction of the lake and the tracks of the Lakeshore Railroad.

It was a warm night, but dark, with a promise of rain before long.

Finally Harry got into the lonesome and deserted stretch of ground near the lake shore, south of the railroad yards.

The lake lay ahead like a long blot of ink whose margin was distinguished by the line of white beach, with the Lakeshore tracks between the solitary walker and the water.

Suddenly there came to Harry's ear, through the calm night air, the distant cough of a freight engine pulling its long line of box and loaded flat cars toward Rushville.

About this time it began to rain a bit and pretty soon it increased to a smart shower.

Hastings looked around for some place of shelter and soon spied a low shed not far from the tracks.

The place was partly filled with car wheels and axles, and other heavy railroad material.

While the boy stood just within the doorway waiting for the shower to pass the freight train came up and rumbled slowly by toward the yards a short distance away.

With his eyes upon the passing cars he noticed several dark forms swing off of one of the flat cars and alight on the ground.

They started at once toward the shed.

Whoever the men might be, Harry had no particular wish to meet them, especially in that lonesome locality.

He heard the men's voices above the rumble of the train—voices deep, sullen and angry, speaking words which, as they drew nearer, riveted his attention, for he heard the name of the railroad uttered threateningly and coupled with violent curses.

Instantly it struck Harry that these might be some of the late prisoners who had escaped from the baggage car at Waterloo that afternoon.

They were making directly for the shed, and were now so close that it was impossible for Harry to slip away without attracting their attention.

As a matter of fact he was not particularly desirous of doing so after he had noticed the purport of the talk.

The young president of the Lakeshore Railroad was a boy of undoubted courage, and here seemed an opportunity for him to spot a new plot maybe against the company, or at any rate get a line on the movements of the rascals that would lead to their recapture.

With this end in view Hastings retired as far away from the opening as he could get, and crouching down behind the railroad material awaited developments.

He had scarcely accomplished this move before the men entered the shed.

Whatever lingering doubts he might have had as to the identity of the visitors were set at rest when one of them struck a match to light his pipe and the glow revealed the ugly bearded countenance and bandaged wrist of the ring-leader of the afternoon's trouble at Tyrone Bridge.

"These four are a part of the crowd that escaped from Jordan," breathed Hastings. "I wonder where the rest are?"

Harry realized that it would go pretty hard with him if his presence in the shed was discovered by these men, for they had little love for any of the new officers of the company.

They had lost their jobs through the change in the management, and it would give them lots of satisfaction to do up one of the new officials, especially the young president who had made things so warm for them at Tyrone Creek that afternoon.

But Harry was not worrying much about their finding

him there, as the shed was too dark for them to see him, and he proposed to keep as quiet as a mouse.

"What time was Donovan to be here with the cartridges?" asked one of the men.

"He's due now," replied the ringleader, gruffly.

"Well, I hope he won't disappoint us," growled the first speaker.

"No fear of that," replied the bearded man, reassuringly. "He'll be on hand all right."

"But it's going on to twelve o'clock."

"What of that? We have lots of time before us. There's nothin' much doin' in the roundhouse between twelve and four, and if we manage this thing right there won't be much left of the old place in an hour or so from now."

"I hope there won't," snarled the first spokesman. "But we can't be too cautious, Driscoll," to the ringleader. "There's half a dozen cops lookin' for us, and we can't tell just where they may happen to be at this moment."

"Let 'em look," grunted Driscoll. "They'll never think of huntin' for us so close to the yards. I'll bet they fancy we'll lay low for a spell after the jolt we got to-day. Blast that kid who said he's president of the company! He's a tougher proposition than I took him to be. I'd have mashed his head in all right only for that detective who broke my wrist with a bullet. I only hope I meet that officer where I can get back at him for that. I'll make him a subject for a coroner's jury, or my name ain't Dan Driscoll."

The vindictive way the man spoke made Hastings shudder.

He believed the fellow was quite capable of carrying out his threat.

"I'll have to warn Jordan about this chap," he thought. "He's a dangerous rascal, and can't be arrested any too soon. So they've got designs on our roundhouse here, eh? Intend to destroy it, I suppose, if they can? It's lucky the rain drove me into this shed. I guess I'll be able to put a spoke into their wheels. I hope I'll be able to get an insight into all their plans before they leave here. Then I'll be in a position to act with some purpose."

"Are you sure Donovan has been able to get them cartridges?" asked the first speaker, after a pause.

"Why not?" snarled Driscoll. "All he had to do was to go to the spot where I buried 'em, dig up half a dozen, and fetch 'em here."

"He seems to be takin' his time about it," grumbled the other. "Mebbe he's afraid of gettin' a wettin'," sarcastically.

"It ain't rainin' now," remarked the one who stood nearest to the door.

"Hist!" cried the fourth man warningly. "I hear some one comin'."

"It must be Donovan," said Driscoll, in a hoarse whisper. A silence fell upon the shed, and then Harry distinctly heard footsteps approaching the place.

"It's Donovan," said the man who had called their attention to his coming.

In another moment a tall, husky looking fellow slouched into the shanty.

"You've been a long time gettin' here," said the man who had been doing the kicking. "What the deuce delayed you?"

"Well, one of the detectives that's after us delayed me, if you want to know, Mulligan," responded the new arrival.

"I thought mebbe it was the rain," chuckled Mulligan.

"The rain be jiggered! I was crossin' a lot half a mile below here, with these six cartridges nicely tucked under me arm, when a fellow suddenly came out of the darkness and asked me who I was and where was I goin' at that hour. I asked what right he had to question me in that way, when he threw open his coat and showed me his shield. 'I'm a detective,' he says, 'and I want to know all about you before you take another step.' 'Well,' says I, 'me name is Murphy, and I'm goin' home from me work at the foundry below here.' 'What is that you've got under your arm?' says he. 'Some things I'm bringin' home,' says I. With that he felt of the bundle, and I thought he was quite satisfied. 'Do you mind lettin' me look into it?' says he. 'What for?' says I. 'You may be a thief and that stolen property for all I know to the contrary,' says he. 'Do I look like a thief?' says I, pretending to be indignant. 'Handsome men than you are crooks,' says he. 'You can't always go by looks. So just oblige me by lettin' me have a peep, or I'll run you in as a suspicious character.' I knew it would be all up if he caught sight of them cartridges, so while makin' a pretense of doin' as he wanted, I suddenly hauled off and smashed him in the face with me fist. He fell to the ground, and then I danced upon him till he was past all thinkin'. After that I tied his hands with his own handkerchief, and filled his mouth full of wet dirt. Then I left him."

Thus speaking Donovan gently laid the bundle of cartridges behind one of the ponderous car wheels.

CHAPTER IX.

DISCOVERED.

"Now to business," said Driscoll, putting his pipe in his pocket. "We are all of one mind, aren't we? and determined to deal out justice to the railroad in our own way?"

"Aye, aye," responded the others as with one voice.

"What else are we here for?" added Mulligan.

"Good enough," said Driscoll, emphatically. "It has been decided to destroy the usefulness of yonder roundhouse and the engines that's in it. You all understand that, I s'pose?"

"We understand it all right," responded Donovan.

"You brought six dynamite cartridges with you to attach to the locomotives?"

"I did."

"Now it won't do for all of us to go into the roundhouse. One, or two at the most, should be able to do the work while the rest of us stand watch outside."

"I'm willin' to go in and plant the explosives," said the man at the door.

"Oh, you are, eh?" replied Driscoll, looking searchingly at the speaker, who stood with his hands in his pockets and his soft hat pulled well down about his eyes.

"I am," returned the man promptly.

"Your name is Snorkey, ain't it?" asked the ringleader.

"That's what it is."

"You're one of us, of course, but I don't remember your face."

"Oh, he's all right," put in Mulligan.

"It wouldn't be well for him if he wasn't," answered Driscoll, significantly. "I didn't see you at the bridge to-day."

"I was there. I got this clip on the head from one of the railroad men," said Snorkey, pulling off his hat and showing his head bound up with a dirty red handkerchief.

"Well, I'll take your word for it. You were one of the lucky chaps who didn't get nabbed with the rest of us."

"That's right. I slipped off through the woods. I wouldn't have been here with you only I ran across Mulligan, and he took me in tow."

"I hold you responsible for this man, Mulligan," said Driscoll, sharply.

"All right. You don't s'pose I'd have brought him here if I didn't know he was all right?"

"No; I don't think you would. You're not takin' any more chances than we are. If we should happen to get caught at this night's work it's a good fifteen years we'd put in at the State prison. That's the risk we've undertaken to-night, and I hope you understand it. If any one of you want to back out of it, now is the time to do it," and he looked around in the gloom.

"But if we carry the thing through without gettin' caught we'll have our revenge and a thousand dollars apiece to spend out of the State, for it wouldn't be wholesome for us to be seen in this neighborhood after such a thing as blowin' up this here roundhouse," said Donovan.

"You're sure the money part of it is all right, Driscoll?" asked Mulligan, eagerly. "We're lookin' to you for that, you know. You won't tell us who the chap is that's puttin' up the dust, nor what his object is in payin' us for squarin' our account with the railroad."

"If I told you you'd know as much as I do, and the gent ain't takin' no chances with his name, for very good reasons that you may easily guess. His name is a secret that gets no further than me, see? That's my bargain with him, and I always keep my agreements. It's enough for you chaps to know that you get a thousand cases apiece when the job's done up to the handle. If we get caught, or the thing misses fire, we get nothin'. Consequently it's up to us to see that it goes through all right."

"You ain't said whether you want me to fix them cartridges or not," said the man in the doorway.

"You're uncommonly eager to undertake the biggest

part of the risk, young feller," said Driscoll, suspiciously. "Won't it suit you to stand guard outside as well?"

"Sure it will," replied the man, with a slight trace of disappointment in his voice. "You're bossin' this job, I guess."

"I reckon I am. This dynamite is altogether too delicate stuff for any one to handle that ain't used to it. Donovan and me is, so we're going to place the cartridges, see? The rest of you have got to keep a sharp watch ag'in awkward interruptions."

"You and Donovan is welcome to the job," spoke up Mulligan. "I ain't hankerin' after such a thing as monkeyin' with dynamite cartridges. I'd sooner take a chance of goin' to jail any day."

"I believe you, Mulligan," replied Driscoll, with a grin. "Your skin is worth a good deal to you."

"I guess we're all of one opinion on that head if it comes to that," retorted the other, tartly.

"How are you two goin' to get into the roundhouse?" asked the man at the door, curiously.

"Don't you worry about how we're goin' to get in," replied Driscoll, sharply. "We'll get in all right. All we expect of you three is to keep your weather eye liftin' for the watchman, or a straggler about the yard, see?"

"Ain't it most time that we got busy?" asked Mulligan.

"We'll start in a minute, after the freight that leaves at midnight gets out of the yard," said Driscoll. "I'm not goin' to sp'ile a good thing by overdoin' it."

The ringleader took out his pipe again, charged it with some crumbs of tobacco he found in the corner of one of his pockets, and then struck a match.

Donovan also took out his pipe and prepared to indulge in a short smoke.

The others, save the man at the door, roosted on a wheel apiece, and prepared to pass away the moments till the freight appeared.

Hastings had been an attentive and eager listener to this plot to blow up the engines in the roundhouse.

He had been crouching in the same position he assumed at first behind one of the big wheels, not daring to move a finger lest he should make a noise that would attract the attention of the rascals to him.

His position was not only awkward, but, as time passed, it became painful, his lower limbs being cramped up.

Still it was out of the question for him to attempt to alter his attitude until after these men had left the shed.

Unfortunately, however, one of his feet slipped without any move on his part, and, though the noise was slight, the keen ears of Driscoll, whose nerves were on edge with the risk they were running in the project on hand, noticed it.

"What's that?" he exclaimed.

"What do you mean?" asked Donovan.

"I heard a sound back there among the wheels."

"I guess you're dreamin', Driscoll," said Mulligan, incredulously.

"No, I'm not dreamin'" snarled Driscoll, angrily. "May-be there's some one at the back of the shed listenin' through

a knothole. Snorkey, you're nearest to the door—go around and see."

Snorkey hastened to obey, and Mulligan got up and followed him outside.

They returned in a moment and reported that no one was in sight.

"Maybe it was a rat," suggested Donovan.

Driscoll lighted a match and deliberately walked over to the place where Harry lay concealed.

As the match flared up and lighted the spot the rascal plainly made out the form of the boy.

He uttered a fierce imprecation.

"By thunder! There's a spy in the shed!" he cried, reaching down and grabbing for Harry.

Hastings realized that he was discovered and tried to spring to his feet, but the cramp in his limbs prevented him from achieving his purpose, and before he could extricate himself from his fix he was in the ruffian's grasp.

The other men sprang up, startled by their ringleader's exclamation, and the air vibrated with smothered oaths as Driscoll dragged Hastings forward into their midst.

The one who appeared to be the least disturbed, though fully as much interested as his associates, was the man at the door.

"What are you doin' in here spyin' on us?" demanded Driscoll, furiously. "If you're one of them detectives that are after us, all I've got to say is you've put your foot in it good and hard. You'll never leave this shed alive, I can tell you that."

"I'm not a detective," replied Harry, stoutly, though he could not conceal from himself that his situation was a desperate one.

"It's a boy, ain't it?" said Donovan.

"I don't care if it is or not," cried Driscoll, hoarsely. "He's heard all of our plans, and it won't do to deal easy with him."

"Strike a light and let's see what he looks like," said Mulligan.

Donovan flashed a match in Harry's face, and the man at the door uttered an exclamation of surprise, which, however, was unnoticed.

Driscoll was differently impressed.

"It's the same feller that was at the bridge this afternoon and helped to do us up. He said he was the president of the road."

"The president of the road!" exclaimed Donovan. "Are you Harry Hastings?" he demanded of the boy.

"I am," replied Harry, fearlessly.

The answer fell like a thunderclap on the ears of the amazed ruffians.

CHAPTER X.

THE TUBE OF DEATH.

"So you are Harry Hastings, the president of the Lakeshore Railroad," said Driscoll, in a compressed voice.

Harry made no reply.

"And you've been in here all this time listenin' to every word we said, too," went on the ringleader, in a tone full of menace.

Hastings saw no use of making an answer, and so remained silent.

"Well, I'm sorry for you, that's all. If you're smart enough to run a railroad you're smart enough to know what you're up against. You've recognized one or two of us, at any rate, and we're certain to be pinched sooner or later if you got the chance to put the police on to us. It looks to me, young feller, that it's a question of your life or our goin' to the penitentiary. Now I'm not going to prison if I can help myself; and I don't think any of my pals is willin' to go there to help you out of a hole. So it's my opinion you'll soon draw your last breath."

"You mean to murder me, do you?" said Harry, defiantly.

"That's an ugly word, young feller, but I'm afraid it fits the case exactly."

"Well, I'm not goin' to be a party to it," said the man at the door, in a tone of decision.

"Then take your hook out of this, and leave more room for men who haven't got white livers and chicken hearts," cried Driscoll, turning fiercely on the objector, whom he hadn't fancied from the first. "There'll be more to divide when you are out of the way. Cut it!"

"No, I'm not goin' away, either," replied the man, doggedly, with his hands still in his pockets. "There isn't any call for killin' the boy. It would be the electric chair for all of us. He's got friends that wouldn't leave a stone unturned till they ran us down and brought us to trial."

"How do you know that he has?" demanded Driscoll, with a scowl. "You seem to know altogether too much, it strikes me. What do you know about this feller, anyway, Mulligan? You brought him here and said he was all right. Are you sure he's all right? Are you sure that he hasn't fooled you? Are you sure he isn't a spy in disguise? You're responsible for him, Mulligan, and by heavens! if you've made any mistake you'll have to reckon with me, d'ye understand?"

"Snorkey was fired with me and another chap from the construction gang at Sweetbriar, and I've known him for a year," said Mulligan, in a sulky tone.

"You've known him for a year, have you? You're sure this is the same man, eh? That it ain't no counterfeit? I didn't like the cut of his jib from the first, and I ain't no more satisfied than I was before."

Mulligan was clearly startled at this suggestion, and he looked hard at the man at the door.

"Hold this young feller," said Driscoll to Donovan, who immediately grabbed Hastings by the two arms.

Then the ringleader advanced upon the man who had caused the trouble.

"Look here, I want you to show up that ugly mug of yours. Mulligan says you're all right, and I'm goin' to make sure that you are."

He suddenly struck a match and held it so the glow fell upon the other's face.

Then he knocked up his hat and said:

"You're sure this is Snorkey, are you, Mulligan?"

Mulligan advanced a pace or two and peered into the man's face.

Then he uttered a cry.

"No, it isn't Snorkey," he cried, furiously. "It looks like him, but it isn't him. It must be one of them detectives who has pinched him and then made up to look like him. Don't let him go, for he's heard all our business."

Mulligan's outburst caused a thrill of consternation among the villains.

The counterfeit Snorkey stepped back and drew out his hands with a brace of revolvers.

"Throw up your hands, all of you, or I'll blow your heads off!"

But Driscoll evidently had expected some demonstration of this kind and had his eye on the man.

"You sneaking hound!" he exclaimed, dashing his big fist into the man's face and felling him stunned to the ground. "You shall pay for this with your life—you and that other chap."

Mulligan threw himself on the fictitious Snorkey and tore the revolvers from his nerveless hands.

Then they bound and gagged both of their prisoners with strands of Manila rope they found on the floor of the shed.

This accomplished, they consulted as to what way they would proceed to effectually put them out of the way.

"Look here, mates, we're in this business together, sink or swim. You understand that?" he said, pausing and looking from one to the other.

"Yes," replied Donovan. "Half measures won't do now at all."

"Then you agree to stand by me and do what I say?"

"We agree," said Mulligan.

"Of course, I'm with you," said the third man, whose name was Cartright; "but I don't much fancy the idea of bloodshed. If you say it's got to be done, why of course it's got to be, only I don't like it."

"Are you turning soft-hearted, too?" asked Driscoll, sneeringly.

"Well, it's an awful thing to do a man up in cold blood, especially a young chap that ain't out of his teens yet. Ain't there no other way?"

"No, there isn't," replied Driscoll, shortly.

"I've got an idea how to settle with these chaps without any one of us shedding their blood," said Mulligan.

"Well, what's your idea? If it ain't a sure one you might as well save your breath."

"It's sure enough. We'll all be equally mixed up in it and yet none of us need touch a hair of their heads."

"What is it?" asked Driscoll, impatiently.

"We'll carry 'em with us over to the roundhouse, and when we've got the cartridges fixed, we'll prop these chaps

against a couple of the engines and let them go up with the buildin'."

"It's too much trouble and too much risk," said Driscoll, after a moment's pause. "To carry them and the cartridges would take two trips, and I ain't in favor of it."

"Well, what are you goin' to do, then?" said Mulligan.

"I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll carry out your idea, only instead of taking these fellers to the roundhouse we'll blow 'em up here in the shed. It'll take me and Donovan about fifteen minutes to fix five of them cartridges to the engines and then light the fuses. The other cartridge we'll leave here between these chaps, with a thirty minute fuse attached. The whole six will then go off about the same time. There won't be more than a minute's different between this shed and the roundhouse. That'll save us blowin' these chaps' brains out and maybe attractin' some one's notice."

"That'll do," agreed Mulligan. "So let's get about it, for there goes the freight now."

The unconscious presumed detective was propped up against one of the wheels, while Hastings was placed in a similar position against another.

Then the cartridges were produced, and the length of the fuse reduced one-half on five of them.

The thirty-minute fuse was placed between the prisoners, who were also secured to the axles, and lighted.

"Now, boys, we'd better be goin'," said Driscoll. "Good night, Mr. President, and a pleasant trip to the next world for you both," he concluded mockingly.

The four men then hastily left the shed and started for the roundhouse to complete their dastardly night's work.

Harry and his senseless companion were left alone in the deserted shed with the tube of death-dealing dynamite between them, and the slowly burning fuse gradually eating its way downward toward the explosive.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FAILURE OF THE VILLAINS' SCHEMES.

It was a terrible moment for the young president of the Lakeshore Railroad.

Alone in the darkness and solitude of the shed with death at his elbow.

He was young and vigorous, and love of life was strong within him.

Just on the threshold of a new and ambitious career—with a loving mother to whom he was the apple of her eye; a luxurious home, where his slightest wish was law, and loyal friends ready to swear by him, is it strange that the very idea of being separated forever from all these blessings, in a way most terrible to contemplate, for the moment unnerved him?

But only for a moment, then his thought turned to the bare possibility of making his escape from the awful fate before him.

He had something less than thirty minutes to accomplish

his own rescue, and that of his companion, if the feat was possible.

He began to tug at his bonds with frantic earnestness.

But, though he twisted his arms this way and that, and worked his wrists in every direction till the perspiration poured down his cheeks, he could accomplish nothing.

The ruffians had taken no chances with him, but had made the knots as secure as their fingers could manage to do.

Thus nearly fifteen minutes elapsed in fruitless endeavor, and Harry saw with horror that the fuse was already half way to the cartridge.

"Must I die after all in this terrible manner?" he exclaimed. "Oh, heavens, it is more than I can bear!"

He made another desperate effort to release himself.

Snap!

The cord that held his hands to the axle parted under the strain.

Then he found that the strands about his wrists were sufficiently loose to enable him to draw out his delicately-formed hands.

But his ankles were bound together, and the knots defied his best efforts to untie them.

What was he to do?

He had left his pocket knife in his other suit at home.

Perhaps his unfortunate companion had one in his pocket.

He dragged himself over to the man and thrust his hand into his trouser's pocket.

His fingers closed upon a clasp-knife, and he felt like shouting hurrah.

In half a minute he was free, and in another minute he had freed his associate in peril.

Then he turned his attention to the fuse, now grown fearfully short, and he was about to clip it off, and thus destroy its deadly power, when the idea struck him that he would let it explode, thus attracting attention to the railroad yard.

But not there—not in the shed.

He would remove it to a short distance, where it could do no damage, and he did.

When he returned to the shed he found the fictitious Snorkey sitting up and fumbling around in a dazed way in the dark.

"Come," he said, energetically, grasping the man by the shoulder. "Get up and come with me to the roundhouse. We've got to work lively if we're to save the building."

"Is that really you, Mr. Hastings?" the man asked, in some surprise.

His voice now seemed familiar to the boy.

"Yes. Who are you? A detective?" asked Harry.

"Why, don't you know me, sir? I'm Jordan."

"Jordan!" cried Hastings. "Is it possible!"

"Yes, I'm Jordan, and——"

"No explanations now, please," said Harry, dragging him out of the shed. "It is up to us to save the roundhouse. There are five lighted dynamite cartridges in there

by this time, and we must put out the fuses or the engines and the building will be ruined, and the road badly crippled. Come, let us not lose a moment."

Harry Hastings and detective Jordan dashed across the vacant ground toward the roundhouse.

Moments were precious and they made the dirt fly.

As they entered the yard from one point four shadowy figures slouched hurriedly away from it at another.

The villains had successfully attached the explosives and lighted them.

The yard was comparatively quiet at that hour.

Harry and his companion were soon inside the small roundhouse, which had been built to accommodate a dozen locomotives.

There were half that number in it now, looming up in the darkness of the place like gigantic monsters, grim and silent.

"Now where have they placed those cartridges?" asked Harry, with a nervous impatience. "We'll have to find out mighty quick, or the chances are good that we'll lose our lives in the wreck of the roundhouse."

"I see one," cried the detective. "It's attached to the driving wheel of this locomotive. Look, and you will see the red glow of the fuse. Where the dickens is my knife? I had it in my pocket when——"

"I've got it. Go and locate the next cartridge while I cut this one off."

It didn't take Harry many seconds to render the first cartridge inoperative for the purpose intended, and by that time he heard Jordan calling out to him from the other side of the engine that the next cartridge was attached to the adjoining locomotive.

Harry immediately dashed around the tender and cut off the lighted end of the second fuse.

They worked swiftly but thoroughly to avert the peril that threatened the roundhouse, the detective going on ahead and spotting the cartridges, while Harry followed quickly at his heels.

When they reached the fifth, and presumably last, bomb they found the fuse burned down dangerously near to the explosive; but Hastings killed it with a swift swish of the knife blade.

"That's Number Five. I guess it's the last and the danger is over, thank heaven! They had but six cartridges altogether, and one of them they devoted to the extermination of ourselves."

The words were hardly out of his mouth when a terrific report rang out on the night air, seeming to split the very heavens with a deafening crash.

The earth shook under their feet, and they could feel the jar conveyed by the concussion to the roundhouse.

Harry shuddered.

"If that cord which held my arms to the axle of a pair of those car wheels had not parted I'm afraid that at this moment there wouldn't be enough of you and me left to make a funeral."

"Why, what do you mean?" asked the detective, who was

ignorant of the method adopted by the four villains to send them both out of the world.

"Well, now that it is all over, I may tell you that you're a lucky man. You were unconscious through it all, and thus escaped the mental torture I suffered for a good fifteen minutes before the cord snapped and let my arms loose."

Then Harry went on and told Jordan all that had happened from the moment he had been struck down by Driscoll, and the revolvers taken from him by Mulligan.

It didn't take him more than two or three minutes to do this, and by that time several of the night employees of the company, with lanterns, appeared in the vicinity of the roundhouse.

Harry didn't care to enter into any explanations with his employees, so he simply told them that he and the detective were aware of the causes which had led to the explosion, and that no damage had been done.

The residents of the neighborhood had been aroused, and, naturally, were very much disturbed; but few were courageous enough to make an investigation.

Harry telephoned to the police that an attempt had been made to destroy the roundhouse and its contents, but that the peril had been averted.

He said he could furnish accurate descriptions of the four rascals engaged in the criminal enterprise, and asked that officers be sent down at once to view the evidence of the villains' work.

While awaiting the policemen, Harry asked Jordan how he happened to be in the company of Driscoll and his associates.

"I went to Waterloo with one of the city detectives to see if we could get a line on our escaped prisoners," began Jordan. "From information furnished us by residents of the town we found that the rascals had separated and gone in different directions. Finally we ran down a couple of them. Snorkey was one. We put the screws on them, as we call it, at the same time promising to deal easy with them if they put us on the track of Driscoll. Snorkey was induced to tell enough to convince me that Driscoll was planning some fresh outrage in revenge for their recent defeat at the bridge. Snorkey hinted that somebody, of whose identity he claimed to be ignorant, was at the back of these efforts to destroy the property of the railroad. He gave me the address of the meeting place agreed upon between the men before they separated. The other detective took Snorkey and his companion on to this place while I went to the house of one of our freight employees, borrowed a suit of his working clothes, and made myself up to resemble Snorkey, who is similar to me in build. Then I went to the saloon where the rascals were to meet, but found they had already been there and gone away again. I ran across Mulligan, whom I identified, on the street, and went up to him, passing myself off as Snorkey. As he is not a very sharp chap, the ruse succeeded. He and Snorkey had been quite chummy, and he invited me to take a hand in to-night's enterprise, which I agreed to do, of course, for the purpose not only of putting a spoke in such a

dastardly plot but of capturing the criminals as well. We met Driscoll and Cartright in the bushes along the track about a mile outside of Waterloo, and when the night freight bound for Rushville came along we boarded one of the flat cars, and rode as far as yonder lot, when Driscoll ordered us to get off, and then led the way to the hut where you were hiding. With the rest of the affair you are as familiar as I am."

"We have been very fortunate not only in saving our own lives but the property of the company as well," said Harry. "But here are the officers. We'll take them over to the roundhouse and show them how those scoundrels tried to accomplish their purpose."

It was early in the morning when Hastings got to bed, but the wheels of justice were already in motion to run down Driscoll and his associates.

CHAPTER XII.

IN THE HANDS OF THE ENEMY AGAIN.

Within the next few days several of the men who had escaped from the baggage car at Waterloo were taken into custody and jailed at Rushville, but though Jordan and several of the detectives hunted the immediate country high and low for Driscoll and his three associates, no trace of their whereabouts was discovered.

"It's too bad that we can't catch those chaps," remarked Harry on the third morning to Walter Whipple, as the latter was seated in the president's office.

"That's what it is. The road isn't safe while they're at large," answered Walt, earnestly.

"Driscoll let out that some one is backing them to destroy our property. If we could only get a line on that scoundrel we'd make it mighty hot for him, even if he was as high in the social scale as Parsons Thorndyke."

"I strongly suspect it is he who is really at the bottom of all our trouble."

"Well, until we can obtain some evidence connecting him with that face, we dare not breathe a word of our suspicions," replied Hastings. "Of course he wouldn't be so foolish as to have any direct dealings with such a man as Driscoll. Cyrus Gage is doing his dirty work, and it is more than probable he is operating through some one else if he is doing business with Driscoll. As I told you once before, our real enemies are too clever to get caught at anything crooked themselves."

"Still the craftiest folks sometimes make mistakes, and silly ones at that, so I've heard, and maybe some little error on the part of those who are trying to do up the road will let a flood of light in upon them."

"It is to be hoped such a fortunate thing will happen. If we can catch Driscoll we'll put him through the third degree, as it is called, and see what comes of it. I doubt if there's any real honor among thieves. Through him, under proper pressure, we may be able to reach 'the man higher up.'"

"We're getting about all the freight that's carried be-

tween here and Brookport now," said Walt. "The steamers are carrying very little of anything—either passengers or merchandise—in spite of the fact that it's the middle of summer. When winter comes if they run more than one boat, making just one round trip, I shall be surprised."

"Our new branch as far as Sweetbriar is doing surprisingly well, don't you think, Walt?"

"I do; but just you wait till it's finished to Loon River, where it will connect with the M. & N. That branch was one of your father's pet ideas, and it's going to pan out just as he thought it would."

"I am satisfied that it will. I notice that all the stockholders I have heard from are more than pleased with the way the Lakeshore is coming to the front again. If we asked for a vote of confidence at this stage of the game we'd have no difficulty in getting it."

"I'll bet we wouldn't. The way you handled that Tyrone Bridge affair yesterday is a feather in the management's cap. The papers this morning gave you a splendid notice, but that will be nothing to what the afternoon editions will print about last night's situation at the roundhouse."

That afternoon Hastings passed Parsons Thorndyke and his son Clarence on the street near the post-office, and they scowled at him.

"They look as if they had just eaten something that disagreed with them," said Harry to himself, smothering a grin, for he easily guessed it was the sight of him which had given rise to their billious look.

The next moment he was face to face with Florence Ashley.

"Why, this is an unexpected pleasure, Mr. Hastings," she said, with a bright smile.

"You are looking unusually charming this afternoon, Miss Florence," he replied, gallantly.

"I'm afraid you're a great flatterer," she answered with a blush. "It's a lovely afternoon, isn't it?"

"That's what it is. Are you out shopping?"

"I'm buying a few things for mamma, and taking in the window displays."

"You might buy a couple of new songs while you're about it for next Wednesday evening. I shall be up to see you without fail, if nothing happens to prevent me."

"Dear me, I'm glad you reminded me. I intended to call at a music store, but would have forgotten all about it only for you."

"It is fortunate we met then," grinned Harry. "I'm afraid you will have to excuse me now, as I have an important engagement."

"You are a very busy young man since you became president of the Lakeshore, aren't you?" she said, with a smile.

"Well, rather. I'm having all kinds of new experiences. When you read the afternoon paper you'll find that I was up against a pretty tough thing after leaving your home last evening."

"Dear me, do tell me about it."

"I'd be glad to oblige you, only I haven't the time now,

and it's quite a story. The newspaper, however, will give you an outline of it, and when I see you again I'll supply whatever points are missing."

"Very well. I'll hold you to your word."

With that they parted, each going in an opposite direction.

As Harry passed the offices of the Brookport Navigation Company he saw Cyrus Gage standing at the door talking to one of the minor politicians of Rushville.

The ex-superintendent looked up and favored the boy with an insolent stare, not unmixed with a look of hatred.

"Gage seems to be down on me like a thousand bricks. Well, I sha'n't lose any sleep over that fact. He only got what was coming to him when I let him down and out of the road. I'll bet he'd like to do me up out of revenge for his bounce. He wouldn't put on quite such a front, I guess, if he knew I'm having him shadowed by a detective."

A few days later Hastings took another trip to Brookport and thence up the branch to the point where the road was in course of construction to Loon River.

The contractor was now pushing work from both ends, and expected to have his part of the job done in two weeks.

The company was laying its own rails under the direction of its superintendent of construction.

The double track was down as far as the east fork of the Loon River, a narrow stream which took its rise among the mountains, around the base of which the branch line circled to what was known as Rock Pass, where it passed through the range and across the newly completed bridge over the east fork.

The bridge was a single span steel girder resting on stone buttresses.

Its situation was wild and romantic, and represented the only difficult bit of engineering along the whole length of the branch line.

Harry's object was to take a look at this bridge, which had already been inspected and passed upon by his superintendent of construction, who was also engineer of the road.

A handcar was called into requisition, with two Italians to work the lever, and Harry and the superintendent left Sweetbriar, for a twelve-mile run.

The car came to a stop at the entrance to the pass, the Italians taking their dinner pails and sitting down by the side of the track, while Hastings and the construction superintendent walked through the cut till they came to the bridge.

"It's a fine piece of work, Mr. Nixon," said Harry, viewing the steel structure with an approving eye. "It cost a good bit of money, but I judge it's worth every dollar we've spent on it."

"It is," replied Mr. Nixon.

"The east fork is rather a turbulent stream at this point."

"That's because this is the narrowest point and is all cut up with rocks."

"It's the one picturesque spot on the line."

"Well, it's certainly as lonesome looking and wild as if it was in the heart of the range. Why, hello! What does this mean?"

The astonished engineer pointed to a gaping hole in the masonry of one of the bridge supports.

At that moment something came whizzing through the air.

It was a jagged bit of rock.

Barely missing Harry's face, it struck the engineer a glancing blow on the head, stretching him senseless on the ground.

Hastings turned in a startled way to see whence the missile had come, when a second stone struck his derby hat and sent it rolling into the rushing stream below.

Then up from behind the rocks not far away rose the forms of Driscoll, Donovan, Cartright and Mulligan, looking gaunt, haggard and villainous in the extreme.

Donovan and Cartright launched two more rocks at the young president as the four rascals came rushing at him.

One of the stones hit Harry on the arm, the other on the shoulder, causing him to stagger back and grasp one of the bridge supports to save himself from plunging head foremost into the torrent.

Before he could recover himself, Driscoll and Mulligan both had him by the arms and pinned against one of the steel uprights of the bridge, while their faces glowed with a malignant triumph that boded ill for the boy.

CHAPTER XIII.

A NARROW SHAVE.

"You dare to utter a sound, young feller, and I'll choke the breath out of you!" cried Driscoll, grasping Hastings' throat in a way that showed he meant business.

Harry saw that resistance was useless, so he submitted with the best grace he could.

"You spoiled our plans the other night by escaping in some way from the shed after we thought we had you dead to rights. How did you do it?"

"That's for you to find out," retorted the boy, coolly.

"Oh, it is, is it?" snarled the ringleader. "Well, I'll see that you don't escape this time so easily."

"What have I done to you that you are making such a dead set at me?" asked Harry.

"Well, you caused our discharge from the road for one thing, see?"

"If you had done the right thing while in our employ you wouldn't have been discharged. You were lazy and half drunk most of the time, and under any one but Cyrus Gage and his appointees you wouldn't have lasted a week."

"Yah!" cried Driscoll angrily. "What do you know about it anyway?"

"I was over the line several times before I became presi-

dent, and I never saw you, and another like you, attending properly to your business."

"You seen a lot, you did," sneered Driscoll. "What do you know about railroading, I'd like to know?"

"What I know about it needn't worry you, Dan Driscoll."

"It doesn't worry me a cent. I'm goin' to let you do the worryin'," with a short, significant laugh.

"I'd better tie his hands and feet, hadn't I?" said Donovan, taking a couple of pieces of rope from his pocket.

"Go ahead," said Mulligan.

In a few minutes Hastings was quite helpless.

"You've got a wad of oakum in your pocket, haven't you?"

"Yes," replied Donovan.

"Gag him with it."

The big rascal forced Harry's jaws apart and stuffed the oakum into his mouth.

"You make a purty picture now, you do. Haw, haw, haw!" laughed Driscoll, insultingly, to the prisoner. "I hate young upstarts like you, and I like to take 'em down a peg or two. As for you, we're goin' to do you up for keeps, and we're goin' to make a sure job of it this time."

He gave Harry an ugly, malicious look.

The boy realized that he was in a tight box, but his courage didn't fail him just the same.

"What'll we do with this other chap?" asked Donovan, nodding toward the engineer of the road.

"Toss him into the bushes," replied Driscoll, "so he'll be out of sight if them Italians take a notion to come this way."

Donovan and Cartright raised the insensible Nixon and carried him to one side of the road and dropped him into a gully.

"You go up the pass, Cartright, and keep watch, while we finish this little job we had in hand before these chaps came this way," said Driscoll. "Now get to work," he added to the other two, and Harry saw Donovan and Mulligan wade into a clump of bushes and presently reappear with a big hammer and a steel rod sharpened at one end.

They descended the side of the bank till their heads were below the level of the bridge, and presently the boy heard the sound of the hammer striking blows upon a metallic substance.

Harry knew what they were doing.

They were enlarging the hole in the masonry which the engineer pointed out the moment before he had been struck down.

Their object was apparently to weaken the bridge support, but Harry did not see how they could hope to accomplish much in the short time left to them before there would be a relay of men on the spot to begin laying another batch of rails.

It would take days of hard work with such tools to break away enough of the rock and concrete to do any great damage.

After fifteen minutes Driscoll relieved Mulligan, and

after a similar lapse of time Mulligan returned and let Donovan up to rest.

In this way they worked ahead for something like an hour, and every little while Hastings could hear bits of rock go tumbling down into the water below.

Then Cartright came walking quickly back and said that the Italians were coming up the pass toward the bridge.

Evidently they had grown tired waiting for the chief of construction and his young companion to reappear, and were coming to see what was keeping them away so long.

Driscoll, who was not working at the moment, called Donovan and Mulligan up.

"Carry that young chap into the bushes. Those two Italians are coming this way, and they mustn't see us."

A minute later the approach to the bridge was clear, and there was not a sign of a human being in the neighborhood.

The Italians strolled up to the bridge and looked around for the two passengers they had brought up on the hand car.

Of course they didn't see them.

They looked across the girders which composed the bridge, and up either side of the pass itself, but were no wiser than they were before.

Evidently they were puzzled over the disappearance of the persons they were looking for.

They had loitered around awhile, chattering to each other, and they slowly returned the way they had come.

The four scoundrels, from their place of concealment, watched every movement of the Italians, and as soon as they were well out of sight they returned to their unfinished job, at which they worked steadily, while Cartright kept watch as before.

In about twenty minutes Driscoll pronounced the work satisfactory.

"Get those two dynamite cartridges," he said to Donovan.

The man traveled up the face of the hillside a little distance and soon came back with the explosives.

Driscoll went down to the hole in the masonry and thrust the bombs one by one, with great care, into the opening.

"Now fetch that boy," he said grimly.

Harry was lying on his back in a gully when Donovan and Mulligan came and lifted him up.

They carried him to the edge of the embankment and lowered him down to Driscoll.

That ruffian called for another piece of rope, which Donovan supplied him with, and he proceeded to bind Harry's already bound arms to one of the stones they had left in a position to serve their purpose.

"Now, young feller, we'll see if you can wriggle out of this scrape, like you did out of the other. There are two powerful dynamite cartridges in that hole behind you which I'm goin' to light right away. They'll blow this bridge pier to smithereens and you with it, and that'll let the steel framework down into the river, see? That's the way we'll

kill two birds with one stone," and he grinned ferociously.

Hastings could not reply to the villain's speech because his mouth was stuffed with oakum, but there was not a quiver of fear in the glance he returned his self-appointed executioner.

"You'll have just ten minutes this time to settle up your earthly accounts," grinned Driscoll. "That'll be long enough for us to get out of the way."

He stood there a moment gloating over his young victim, then he waved his arm to Donovan and Mulligan above who were looking down at him, and struck a match to light the fuses.

The two rascals started to get away from the danger zone.

At the same moment a gust of wind sweeping up under the bridge extinguished the match.

Driscoll uttered an oath and put his hand in his pocket for another.

Harry had been thinking pretty rapidly since the moment he understood the diabolical object of the rascals.

Glancing downward he saw the water rushing over and between the black rocks in the narrow channel of the river.

He also saw that Driscoll had not a very strong footing as he stood close in front of him fumbling for the second match.

If he could but release one hand he might strike him such an unexpected blow as to topple him over backward.

But this was out of the question, for his wrists were bound too securely for that.

As Driscoll got out the match and leaned over to strike it on the steel stringer, like a flash a plan occurred to the boy.

Quickly he drew up his bound legs and then suddenly shoved them forward right against the villain's knees, with all the strength he could bring to bear on them.

Driscoll hadn't expected any such thing as this, and consequently was entirely unprepared to meet it.

His legs were dislodged from their foothold, he lost his balance and went downward like a shot.

Throwing out his hands to save himself he caught the cord which bound the boy's legs together, and thus his whole weight was thrown upon Harry.

Hastings was dragged outward by the shock, which was no light one, as the man weighed all of 160 pounds.

For a moment Driscoll hung suspended in the air, and then two sharp snaps occurred almost simultaneously.

The rope about the lad's feet gave way, letting the rascal drop into the river, and the cord which held Harry's arms pinioned to the rock parted and he went down himself after Driscoll.

CHAPTER XIV.

HARRY HASTINGS MAKES AN IMPORTANT DISCOVERY.

The scoundrel struck upon one of the rocks in his descent and was whirled off by the stream in a half stunned condition.

Hastings was more fortunate.

He hit the water in an open spot and was not injured at all.

He rolled over on his back as the current caught him in its embrace, but before he had gone very far he managed to extricate his hands from the loosened strands, and striking out among the rocks presently reached the shore.

He saw no sign of Driscoll anywhere in the yeasty water, nor clinging to a rock, so he guessed he must have been carried off down the stream.

Looking upward toward the bridge he failed to make out any trace of the other three rascals.

Still he knew they must be hard by waiting for Driscoll to join them.

The boy's first thought was the safety of the bridge.

"I must remove those two cartridges at any cost," he said to himself, and with this purpose in his head he crawled back over the rocks which lined the shore till he reached the place from where he had fallen.

He found much difficulty in making his way up the steep side of the bank, but finally succeeded in reaching the hole the rascals had dug out of the masonry.

Reaching in his hand he grasped the first cartridge and drew it carefully out.

He tossed it into the river as far from him as he could propel it.

The second bomb shared the same fate, and then Hastings breathed easier.

The bridge at least was safe.

"I wonder where those other rascals are at this moment?" he thought, as he clung to his precarious footing on the side of the bank. "It won't be safe, I guess, for me to show myself at this point. I'll have to climb up somewhere else. Those chaps must be wondering what delays Driscoll."

Harry worked his way back again to the water's edge and started to pick a path for himself over the slippery rocks.

In this way he proceeded for some distance until he found a place where he could climb the bank with comparative ease.

But this took him a considerable distance from the pass up into the mountain, where his progress was impeded by tangled shrubbery and huge rocks jutting out here and there from the hillside.

He lost sight of the river and the railroad bridge in the maze of trees and rank vegetation through which he was forced to plunge.

His object was to work around and descend to the pass at some point where he hoped to escape observation from Driscoll's associates.

But the further he penetrated the mountain wilds the more mixed up and bewildered he became in that trackless locality.

"I wonder where I'm getting to, anyway?" he thought ruefully, stopping and looking around. "I believe I must be walking away from the pass. I can't make head or tail of my present situation. It looked easy enough to

strike out for the cut when I left the vicinity of the river, but I have certainly lost my bearings. If it wasn't a cloudy afternoon the position of the sun would give me some idea how to proceed, but as it is I seem to be completely lost in this dreary looking mountain district."

There was nothing else for him to do than to keep on in the hope that he would come out somewhere in the course of time.

Finally he found himself in a deep ravine or gorge, where the sound of rushing water struck upon his ears.

"Is that the river I've struck again?" he mused.

He followed the gushing noise and soon came upon a waterfall.

It was formed out of a dozen small streams rushing headlong down a great height, joining in places and then separated in parts by the projecting rocks, finally mingling together in a pool below, whence the water boiled among a waste of rocks and ran on through the further end of the gorge in a tumbling torrent, that was presently lost in an abrupt turn.

While the boy was admiring the wild grandeur of the spot into which he had inadvertently strayed, he caught sight of three saddle horses tied to a tree.

He walked toward them, and saw that they were sleek, well-fed animals.

On the saddle of one he saw the initials P. T. in German silver letters.

"I've seen that horse before more than once," he breathed in some surprise. "If I had any doubts about it those plated initials are enough to dissipate them. That's Parsons Thorndyke's mare, sure enough. I never knew any one to ride her but he, so, unless some one has stolen her, which seems unlikely, Mr. Thorndyke must be in this neighborhood. What could bring him up here in the mountains, I'd like to know? Surely not on a pleasure jaunt. It looks suspicious to me, considering that Driscoll and his associates have been in hiding here, and were working to destroy that new steel bridge of ours. I'll just hide in among these bushes and see what turns up."

Harry hadn't been squatted out of sight many minutes before he heard voices approaching, and presently Parsons Thorndyke, Cyrus Gage and the Rushville politician came into view.

"Something must have prevented those rascals getting their work in on that bridge," said Thorndyke, with every sign of impatience. "Your man Driscoll seems to be making a failure of everything he undertakes," in a tone of disgust.

"It hasn't been his fault, I'll warrant," maintained the politician. "Luck has simply been against him."

"Luck!" snorted Thorndyke. "This is the third attempt he's made against the railroad property, and it seems to be sharing the fate of the other two that missed fire at the last moment. If this one doesn't go, I'll wipe my hands of the whole business, for it's getting altogether too risky. The luck seems to be all on the side of the railroad and those three boys who undertook to run it. They

come out ahead every time. Why, look how that Hastings and his detective escaped being blown up the other night. And in relation to that matter—I didn't expect any lives were to be sacrificed to accomplish the end I am looking for. I've got no love for that boy, it is true, but I don't want him killed, do you understand that, Roach?"

"I understand," replied the politician. "But you see, those men caught him listening to their plan to destroy the roundhouse, and they acted on the principle that dead men tell no tales."

"Well, I won't have any such business as that," said Thorndyke, vehemently. "I arranged with you through Gage here to cripple the railroad, and I promised to pay you \$10,000 to see that some kind of job was put through that would answer the purpose, but it was understood that no lives were to be put in danger. The first thing your man Driscoll did was to move against the Tyrone Bridge. Now, what I want to know is why he didn't succeed? He had a big crowd of men with him who seemed to be disgruntled with the railroad, because they had been discharged by the new management. They had everything their own way apparently, yet their movements leaked out somehow, for the railroad people arrived on the ground in time to prevent them carrying out their purpose. Then Driscoll planned to blow up the roundhouse at Rushville. He had everything in his favor, yet Hastings and one of the railroad detectives discovered the plot, and in spite of the fact that Driscoll caught them and tied them in the old shed back of the freight yards, they succeeded in getting away and saving the roundhouse after the bombs had been placed in position and the fuses lit."

"Well, wasn't that a clear case of hard luck against Driscoll?" asked Roach. "Didn't he and his men do all that any one could have done to blow up that roundhouse? Luck was simply with that boy and the detective. They escaped death by the skin of their teeth, and then had just time enough to queer Driscoll's well-laid scheme."

"Well," admitted Thorndyke, "I'm willing to allow that that failure was not your man's fault. But how about this steel bridge matter? You assured me that it would positively be blown up this afternoon, and here we've been waiting for some two hours for the explosion to take place, and there doesn't seem to be anything doing."

"It isn't too late yet, sir," said Roach. "Driscoll is holding back to make a sure thing of it. He wants to get that \$5,000 I've promised him, and doesn't care to spoil everything by rushing matters."

"He's had the best chance this afternoon he's likely to get again, as the company's supply of rails gave out yesterday, and there's no work on in the pass to-day. A construction train is liable to be out here any time now—certainly not later than to-morrow morning, and unless he gets in his work now he might as well give it up."

"Oh, he'll succeed, don't you fear," replied the politician confidently.

"Well, I hope he will," gruffly; "but I'm beginning to have my doubts about it."

Parsons Thorndyke unhitched his horse, and Gage followed suit.

"Then you don't mean to wait any longer?" said Roach.

"No," returned Thorndyke. "It will be dark by the time we reach Brookport."

"Well, I'll follow you after I take a look over in the pass and see how the job is getting on. Perhaps I shall bring you word that the bridge has been blown up."

"You'll find us at the Brookport House, where Gage and I will stay to-night. We'll expect to hear something encouraging."

Thorndyke and Cyrus Gage then mounted their animals and rode slowly away down the gorge, while Roach, leaving his horse tied to the tree, started up the path by which Harry Hastings had entered the ravine, and disappeared.

Harry waited a few minutes and then came from his place of concealment.

"Well," he muttered, "luck is certainly coming my way in huge chunks. Not only have I escaped death by a miracle this afternoon, but I have at last traced the conspiracy against the Lakeshore to the fountain head. It is just as I suspected. Parsons Thorndyke is the man behind it all."

At that moment a hand was laid upon his shoulder.

CHAPTER XV.

THE PUZZLED RUFFIANS.

Harry was much startled and turned around quickly, expecting to find himself face to face with his enemies.

Instead of that he found a rough looking man standing just behind him indulging in a quiet chuckle.

"Who are you?" demanded Hastings, rather abruptly, but much relieved to find that his fears were groundless.

"You don't recognize me?" said the stranger.

"No, I do not."

"My disguise must be pretty good then. I am Jordan."

Harry peered sharply into his begrimed face.

"By George!" he exclaimed in a pleased tone. "You are Jordan. I'm mighty glad to meet you here."

"And I'm deuced surprised to see you here in these mountains. Doing some detective work on your own account?" with a grin.

"Hardly. And yet I've made a great discovery quite by accident."

"I know you have."

"You know I have?"

"Sure. I saw you come into the pass a little while ago, look at those horses when the three were tied to that tree. Then you hid in the bushes just in time to hear Parsons Thorndyke give himself away."

"And you overheard him, too?"

"Every word. I've been watching the three of them ever since they came into the mountains, and I've heard a good deal they said. I guess we've got them dead to rights now. Your evidence will corroborate mine in part, at any rate, and that is very important. Mr. Thorndyke, Cyrus Gage and John Roach will find that the law has a long

reach, I'm thinking. I tracked the other chaps to this locality and then lost sight of them. I didn't get on to the fact that they had designs on the steel bridge. I should have fancied that was quite beyond their ability to cope with. I supposed they were simply hiding here from pursuit and capture. As it is, I guess we haven't any time to lose. If those rascals are preparing to blow up the bridge it's a sign that they've got more dynamite in their possession. Here, take on of these revolvers, and we'll go over to the pass and try to put a spoke in their wheel."

"I'll go over with you," replied Harry, accepting the revolver, "but I think the bridge is safe enough."

"You do, after what you just heard?" said the detective in some surprise.

"When you've heard what I have to tell you," replied the boy, "you can then form your own opinion on the matter."

Harry then gave Jordan a succinct account of his afternoon's experiences at the bridge, and thus accounted for his presence in the gorge.

"Great Jerusalem! You had a narrow escape, Mr. Hastings," said the detective. "I guess you've done for that rascal, Driscoll, though it's possible he may have got ashore somewhere down the river. He was the worst of the three scoundrels, and I hope he's out of the way for good."

"I hate to be responsible for his death, in spite of what he has tried to do to me."

"Self-preservation is the first law of nature. It was a case of your life or his, and you have no call to regret what you did. You were a lucky boy to get off as well as you did."

"I agree with you on that point," replied Hastings. "It was touch and go with me, and I had about concluded my last hour had come when the idea came into my head to use my feet against the fellow. If he hadn't been off his guard the plan would probably not have succeeded, and I should be a long way from here at this time."

Jordan seemed to be fairly familiar with the mountain, and while they had been conversing he was piloting the way over to the pass.

At length they caught a view of the bridge and that end of the cut through an opening among the trees.

"We must move with more caution now," said Jordan, "as we don't want to run into those fellows unexpectedly."

So they kept close to the bushes, using their eyes and ears to the best advantage as they slowly advanced down the slope.

They had covered the best part of the distance to the railroad tracks when the detective, who was in advance, suddenly stopped and held up his hand warningly.

"Hist!" he said. "I hear voices."

They crept forward cautiously, and at length reached the edge of an open space.

Here they saw Donovan, Mulligan and Cartright in a bunch talking to Roach.

The latter had evidently just joined them.

Mulligan was telling him about the capture of Hastings and the superintendent of construction, and what had followed, and had just reached the point where the boy had been tied to the mouth of the hole they had excavated in the masonry where he was to be blown up with the end of the bridge, when Harry and Jordan arrived within ear-shot.

"That was an hour ago," said Mulligan. "Everything was ready to touch the dynamite off, and Driscoll gave us the signal to get out of range. We skipped, of course, and came here. We expected Driscoll to join us in two or three minutes. We waited for him, but he didn't come. We had our ears cocked for the explosion, but there wasn't any. After waitin' fifteen minutes we began to wonder what was the matter. We kept a bright lookout for Driscoll, but there wasn't no sign of him. We would have gone down then and investigated if we had dared. None of us would take the risk, as we couldn't say when that stuff would go off. At last, after waitin' half an hour, we crawled over yonder, where we could get a sight of the hole. There wasn't a sign of that boy that we saw Driscoll make fast to the rock."

"Nor a sign of Driscoll either anywhere," put in Donovan. "We didn't know what to make of it. We were sure that somethin' had gone wrong. At last, as there seemed to be no danger of a blow-up, Mulligan and me went down to the bridge and investigated. I looked into the hole where I saw Driscoll put the two dynamite cartridges just before we let the young feller down to him, and derved if there was one of them there. You might have knocked Mulligan and me down with a feather. Where had that dynamite gone to? And where had Driscoll and the boy gone to, too? That's what's been botherin' us since. We came back here to talk it over with Cartright, but we can't make head or tail out of it. It wasn't possible for that boy, bound as he was, to do up Driscoll and then take the bombs out of the hole. Then how is it that the dynamite, and the boy, and Driscoll, too, have disappeared?"

The speaker was clearly uneasy, and his companions shared that feeling.

Roach heard the particulars without saying a word, and when Donovan finished he admitted that it was very mysterious.

"What became of that superintendent of construction? Are you sure he didn't have a hand in the affair?" said Roach.

"No. He was lyin' in the gully a short time ago where we put him. He hasn't come to his senses yet."

"How long has he been lying there?"

"More'n two hours."

"Are you sure you didn't knock him out for good?"

"No fear of that," replied Mulligan.

"Well, to tell you the truth, I don't like the looks of this thing myself," said Roach, in an anxious tone. "I never heard of such infernal hard luck as you chaps have had. This is the third attempt against the company which has failed. Have you got any of that dynamite left?"

"Not a bit. Them was our last two cartridges," answered Donovan. "We expected they'd do the business all right."

"Maybe one of the detectives that's on your track was watching you fellows and stepped in at the last minute, pinched Driscoll, released young Hastings, and pitched the dynamite into the river," suggested Roach.

"I don't see how he could have done it without our knowin' it," said Mulligan. "Driscoll had a gun, and isn't an easy customer to handle."

"If the detective got the drop on him he'd have had to give in."

"We wasn't so far away but we'd have got on to such a thing," said Donovan.

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" asked Roach.

"That's what bothers us. We don't know what to do. We can't get off and leave Driscoll."

"Then you want to look sharp that you ain't pinched while you're waiting for him to turn up," advised Roach, who didn't like the aspect of things and was anxious to make off himself. "I'm going to Brookport now to report this thing to the party that stood ready to stump up the money if you chaps hadn't slipped up. It begins to look as if you were never going to earn that five thousand."

"We've tried hard enough to earn it; but luck has been dead ag'in us from the start. I don't see how we failed to blow that roundhouse and them engines to pieces, when we left five lighted cartridges there to do the business with twelve-minute fuses attached to 'em."

"You slipped up on that because Hastings and that detective got away from the shed in time to prevent the bombs from going off."

"I don't see how they could have escaped," grunted Donovan. "We tied 'em tight enough. I was willin' to swear they didn't have the ghost of a show."

"There ain't no use arguing about it. They did get away, and they saved the engines and the roundhouse. You'll find the same luck has stood by the boy this afternoon. I believe that railroad detective has been in these diggings watching you fellows, and that he's at the bottom of this failure to-day. There doesn't seem to be any other way of accounting for your failure. If you take my advice you'll cross the State line and lay low in Ohio until things quiet down again. If Driscoll hasn't been pinched he'll manage to communicate with me somehow, and I'll tell him you chaps are in hiding somewhere along the line of the M. & N., just over the State line. If he has been arrested you'll hear of it through the papers, and that will be a hint for you to keep away from this locality for good."

"We can't travel far without money," growled Mulligan.

"I'll let you have some to help you along. I haven't much with me, but I guess I can scare up \$50, which you can divide among you."

"Hand it over. It's better'n nothin'," said Donovan.

Roach produced the bills and handed them to Donovan.

"Now I'm off," he said. "Remember, get under cover as soon as you can, and while you have the chance."

Thus speaking the Rushville politician turned around and left them to divide the money and take measures to secure their safety.

CHAPTER XVI.

CONCLUSION.

"Now is your chance," said Detective Jordan. "We'll take them by surprise. If they don't give in at once we must wing them, understand? We can't afford to take any risk."

"I'm with you," said Harry, drawing out the revolver Jordan had loaned him.

The detective, leading the way, stepped out of the shrubbery.

"Throw up your hands, you rascals, or we'll shoot you down in your tracks," he cried, sternly, while he and Hastings covered the three villains with their revolvers.

After the first sensation of surprise, Cartright threw up his arms in a panic, Donovan followed his example slowly and sullenly, but Mulligan, with an oath, thrust his hand into his hip pocket for the revolver he carried.

That movement was fatal to him, for Jordan, whose lynx eye was on him at the moment, fired at his arm.

The bullet, instead of reaching the spot intended, entered Mulligan's side, and he sank down on the ground.

"Turn around, both of you!" roared the detective, with his finger on the trigger.

They faced about, for they were now thoroughly cowed by the fate which had overtaken Mulligan, who lay groaning piteously at their feet.

"Here's some bits of cord, Mr. Hastings," said Jordan. "Tie the arms of those two rascals behind them. If they make the slightest show of resistance, I'll shoot 'em down."

This threat had the desired effect, and the ruffians submitted to have their wrists secured, and Mulligan was disarmed.

"The next question is to get away from this locality with our prisoners. How did you come here, Mr. Hastings?" asked the detective.

"Mr. Nixon and I came up on a hand car, worked by a couple of Italians. We left the outfit at the entrance to the pass. They must be wondering what has become of us."

"Well, go back and bring them here. We want them to carry this wounded man to the car. Hello, there's somebody in the pass now."

"That's Mr. Nixon," said Harry, after a look in the direction indicated by the detective. "He must have just come out of the bushes where these rascals stowed him away. I'll run down and meet him."

It was some time after darkness had closed in on the landscape that the hand car rolled slowly in to Sweetbriar with the three prisoners on board.

Two days afterward word was received from Loon River that a body corresponding to Driscoll's description had been

picked up in the river a short distance below the town, and on investigation it proved to be the corpse of the scoundrel.

Harry Hastings called a special meeting of the Board of Directors and laid before them the full particulars of the three attempts to destroy the property of the company.

Detective Jordan was present, and gave his evidence.

"Gentlemen," said the young president, rising, "while the nominally guilty parties are safe in jail awaiting trial, and the ringleader of the rascals has just been buried at Loon River, the chief conspirator, as I call him, is at large. It is our duty to proceed against and make an example of this eminently respectable rascal, Parsons Thorndyke, and his two agents, Cyrus Gage and John Roach, the well-known political leader of the rowdy element of Rushville. It is my purpose to order their immediate arrest, and I think the evidence we have against them is strong enough to secure their conviction."

After this matter had been disposed of Hastings made a detailed report of the greatly increased business the Lakeshore had been doing ever since the new management took charge.

"The company's revenue from passenger traffic has nearly been doubled, while the freight receipts are to-day as three to one in comparison to what they were under the direction of Parsons Thorndyke," said the boy in conclusion. "The road is bound to resume the payment of dividends this year, and I think that will be the best evidence I can show of our new era of real prosperity. It only goes to prove that the income of the road ought never to have reached the low ebb it did under the Thorndyke regime. Without a doubt Mr. Thorndyke meant to ruin the Lakeshore, so that in time he and his friends could freeze out all the other stockholders and annex the line to the Brookport Navigation Company."

"I am perfectly satisfied that was his object," said Mr. Ashley, Florence's father, "and we are also certain he would have succeeded but for your aggressive activity in forming a coalition against him and his associates, and thus putting it out of his power to carry out his scheme to a finish."

That afternoon Parsons Thorndyke was arrested at his home on a bench warrant, charging him with criminal conspiracy against the Lakeshore Railroad.

Cyrus Gage and John Roach were taken into custody in Brookport and brought on to Rushville.

Then Mulligan, Donovan and Cartright were put on trial, and enough was brought out in court to weave a strong web around Roach, the politician.

The three rascals got fifteen years each.

Then Roach agreed to turn State's evidence against Thorndyke and Gage, and the District Attorney was induced to accept his offer.

Parsons Thorndyke was convicted at his trial and sentenced to ten years at hard labor, while Gage, who pleaded guilty, was let off with five years.

It was shown that Thorndyke controlled the stock of

the Brookport Navigation Co., and the general impression of the Board of Directors of the railroad company that he intended to acquire the Lakeshore for himself and his friends was proven in court.

The result of the whole thing was that the conditions were reversed, for the Lakeshore Railroad bought in the Brookport Navigation Company at public sale, and thenceforward the boats were run only in the summer time in direct connection with the trains and for the benefit of passengers who enjoyed a sail up and down the picturesque lake in the pleasant season of the year.

Under the able management of Harry Hastings and his side partners, Walt Whitman and Lawrence Hawks, the Lakeshore Railroad acquired an enviable reputation among the short lines of the country, and the boys built up an enormous business over the route, both in passengers and freight.

The stock of the railroad rose to many points above par, and was hard to get at even that figure.

Thus Harry's \$2,500,000 worth of stock, which was at one time threatened with utter extinction, was increased to a gilt edge security worth all of \$3,000,000, and the stock of his young friends, as well as that owned by all of the original investors in the road, increased in value in like proportion.

At the end of their term Harry Hastings, Walt Whipple and Lawrence Hawks were unanimously re-elected to the Board, and also to their official positions.

They are now in their third term, with every prospect of continuing in the active management of the road indefinitely.

Recently the wedding cards were issued for Harry's wedding, and the bride of the occasion is the most popular young lady in Rushville society—Florence Ashley.

Walt Whipple is to be the best man and Lawrence Hawks chief usher.

Thus we take leave of the bright progressive lads who proved their ability to take hold in a crisis and successfully run a railroad

THE END.

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